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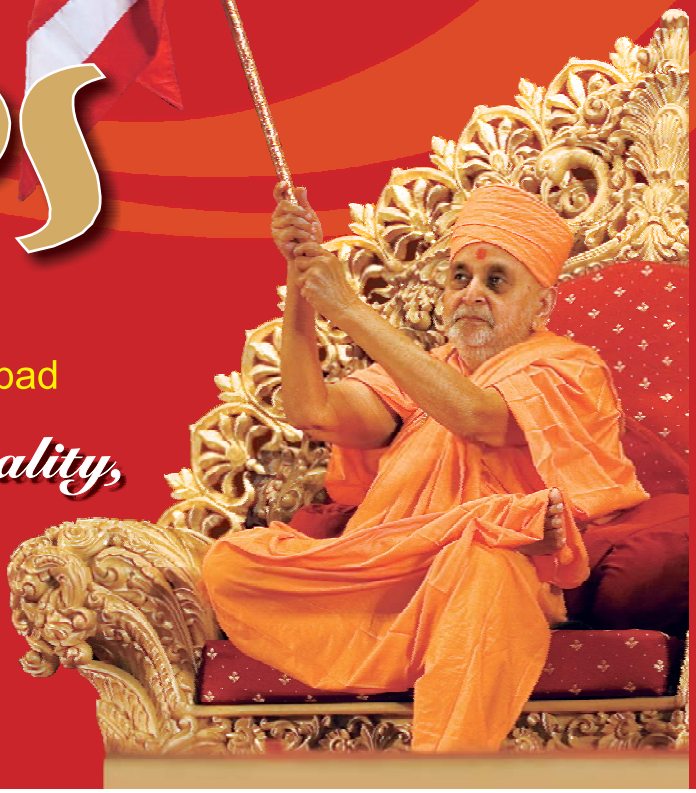
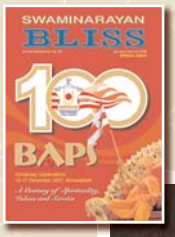
1907-2007
स्वामिनारायण
CENTENARY
1907-2007

BAPS

Centenary Celebrations
13-17 December 2007, Ahmedabad

A Century of Spirituality, Values and Service





Beginning

Beginnings of great significance herald the arrival of a new Era.

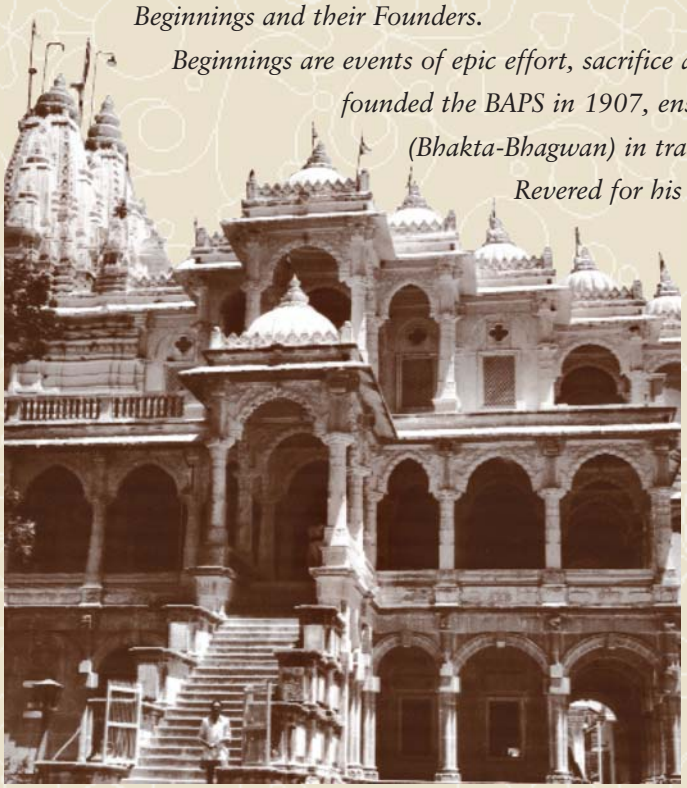
They symbolize a Principle, a Goal and an Experience that revitalize man in his pursuit for eternal happiness. It is customary for humanity to joyously celebrate and adore such legendary Beginnings and their Founders.

Beginnings are events of epic effort, sacrifice and faith. Brahmaswarup Shastriji Maharaj founded the BAPS in 1907, enshrining the principle of Akshar-Purushottam (Bhakta-Bhagwan) in traditional mandirs.

Revered for his saintliness, dedication and love, he accomplished a feat of profound importance and value.

BAPS is the fulfilment of Bhagwan Swaminarayan's vision and a gift for all.

A Thousand Prostrations!



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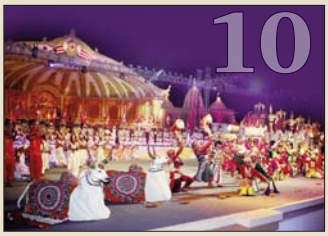

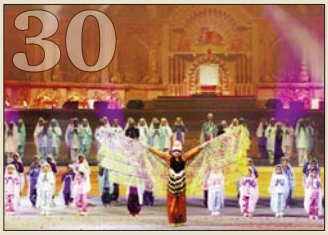

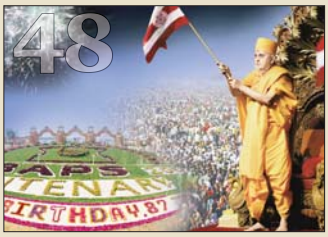

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Shri Akshar-Purushottam Maharaj

HUMBLE HOMAGE AND DEDICATION TO

Bhagwan Swaminarayan

the supreme avatar, for incarnating in human form, establishing *ekantik dharma*, glorifying the Gunatit, God-realized, Satpurush – Aksharbrahman – and promising to remain manifest on earth through him.

Aksharbrahman Gunatitanand Swami

for comprehensively explaining the supreme form and glory of Bhagwan Swaminarayan.

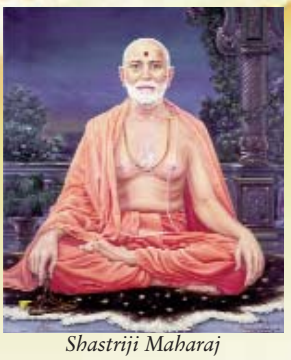
Brahmaswarup Bhagatji Maharaj

for promoting the dual worship of Akshar and Purushottam, and his exemplary life of service and devotion.

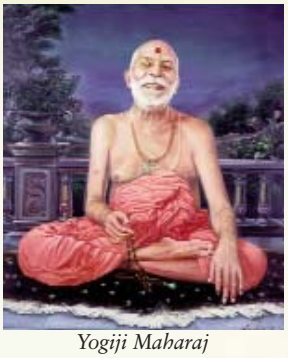
Brahmaswarup Shastriji Maharaj

for enshrining the *murtis* of Akshar-Purushottam in magnificent mandirs, establishing the BAPS and reviving the true *upasana* revealed by Bhagwan Swaminarayan.

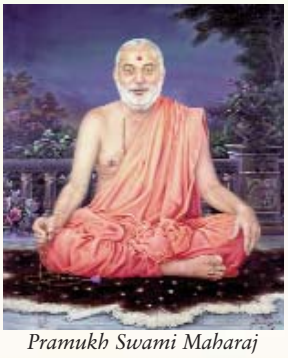
Bhagatji Maharaj



Shastriji Maharaj



Yogiji Maharaj



Pramukh Swami Maharaj

Brahmaswarup Yogiji Maharaj

for launching the weekly *satsang* assemblies, nurturing spirituality in children and youths, initiating learned youths into the sadhu-fold, and consecrating mandirs in East Africa and London.

Pragat Brahmaswarup Pramukh Swami Maharaj

for tirelessly promoting the BAPS ideals and services to all corners of the world through mandirs and character-building centres, comforting and guiding young and old in times of need, and inspiring faith in God among people of all backgrounds.

All BAPS sadhus and devotees

for living by the ideals of Bhagwan Swaminarayan and the Gunatit Parampara, and selflessly dedicating their mind, body and wealth in the service of God, guru and society.

First Word

On 28 November 2006 the year-long BAPS Centenary Celebrations were launched in Bochasan on the 86th birthday celebration of Pramukh Swami Maharaj. Hundreds and thousands of sadhus and devotees worldwide had pledged to practise the *yoga-yagna niyams* as part of the year long Centenary Celebrations. The *niyams* included mantra-writing, *mala*-chanting, fasts, pilgrimages, scripture-reading and others. The bhakti and *satsang* of countless would become the cornerstone of the celebrations.

The BAPS Centenary Year was the celebration of the Akshar-Purushottam philosophy propounded by Bhagwan Swaminarayan and the guru *parampara*. The year also recognized the humongous effort, faith and the towering saintly personality of Shastriji Maharaj (the founder of BAPS), Yogiji Maharaj (the nurturer of BAPS) and Pramukh Swami Maharaj (the inspirer of Akshardham and BAPS on a global scale). Furthermore, it was a year of self-transformation.

On 7 May 2007 Swamishri set out on a Satsang tour abroad to celebrate the Centenary Year: first in Nairobi, then in Chicago, Houston, Toronto, Edison, Atlanta, Los Angeles and London. Swamishri also consecrated two *shikharbaddh* mandirs in Toronto (22 July) and Atlanta (26 August). Thereafter, on arriving in India on 16 October, Swamishri celebrated the Centenary Year event in Mumbai (19 October) and Rajkot (15 November). The grand finale was scheduled at Chandkheda, a suburb of Ahmedabad, on 13, 14, 15 and 17 December.

From September 2007 till the celebrations' opening ceremony more than 13,000 volunteers served in 39 departments for the preparations on the 321-acre land donated by 127 farmers. Work started in mid-September with clearing the site of shrubs and thorns and levelling its grounds. A month later the construction, electricity, water and other departments started work on site. Construction of the giant 350-ft wide and 51-ft high main stage also commenced. During the Diwali vacation in November over 2000 BAPS children and youths from all parts of Gujarat arrived in Ahmedabad to train for the cultural programmes. For 25 days they practised at various BAPS venues in Ahmedabad. The accommodation department for devotees from India and abroad had started preparations three months in advance. Later

Festival preparations by sadhus and volunteers, Chandkheda, Ahmedabad

many thousands of volunteers from other departments became fully engaged in the festival preparations and arrangements.

On Thursday 13 December Pramukh Swami Maharaj lighted the inaugural lamp after the welcome dance by BAPS youths. Thereafter more than 2000 youths presented the superb Youth Day programme based on the theme 'Inspiring Values'. More than 65,000 devotees and well-wishers were present during the three-hour long programme.

Rehearsal on main stage

The next day, 14 December, saw performances by members of the BAPS Women's Wing based on the theme 'Empowering Women'. It was attended by 100,000 devotees. The third day was devoted to Children's Day, themed on 'Transforming Tomorrow'. More than 120,000 devotees and well-wishers appreciated the grand parade of floats depicting values, anti-addiction parade, cultural dances, skits, videos and Swamishri's blessings. The final day, 17 December, climaxed with Guru Bhakti Day, commemorating the 87th birthday of Pramukh Swami Maharaj. It was themed on Swamishri's lifetime credo 'In the Joy of Others'. The evening was witnessed by over 275,000 devotees and guests and many thousands more via Aastha channel. One of the highlights of the evening was the honour bestowed upon Swamishri by Michael Whitty on behalf of Guinness World Records for consecrating a world-record 713 mandirs in the five continents and the recognition of Swaminarayan Akshardham as the largest comprehensive Hindu mandir in the world. The programme also included inspiring testimonials by devotees and well-wishers on transformations introduced by Swamishri, and experiences of Swamishri's divinity and greatness.

Finally, in his blessings Swamishri attributed

Swamishri lights the inaugural lamp; Youths perform Unity dance; Cultural presentation by children

The four-day Centenary Celebrations programme portrayed 100 years of BAPS growth, morality, philosophy, spirituality and service to mankind.

the progress of BAPS and the success of the celebration to Bhagwan Swaminarayan, gurus Shastriji Maharaj and Yogiji Maharaj and the efforts of sadhus and volunteers.

The Centenary Celebrations concluded with the mass *arti* performed by 275,000 devotees, resounding *Jais* of BAPS Shatabdi Mahotsav and a spectacular fireworks display.

To honour the sadhanas of devotees who had written mantras during the centenary year a giant Mantra Vedi (platform) was set up on the celebration grounds. It had 151,027 mantra books, each having 25,000 Swaminarayan mantras. In all, 80,796 devotees from India and abroad had written 3.77 billion mantras.

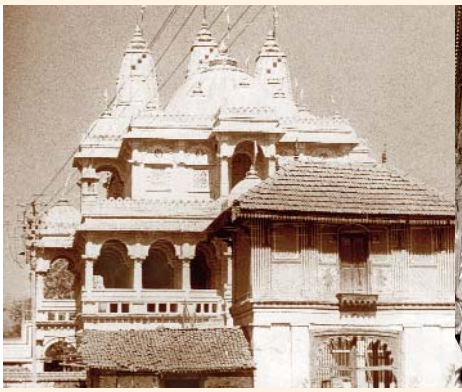
The four-day Centenary Celebrations programme portrayed 100 years of BAPS growth, morality, philosophy, spirituality and service to mankind.

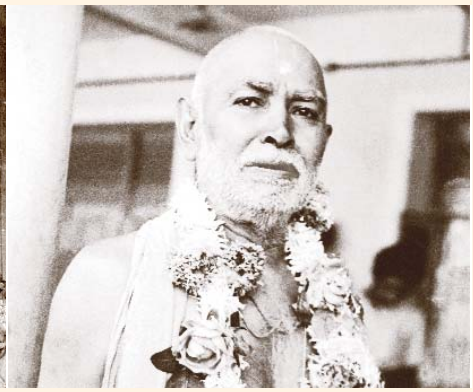
The BAPS, which is widely known and respected today, began with a little spark in the nondescript village of Bochasan, Gujarat. The pioneer, Shastriji Maharaj, with only a few sadhus and scores of devotees, established the BAPS on 5 June 1907 with the enshrinement of Akshar-Purushottam Maharaj at Bochasan. In the following four decades he endeavoured immensely, putting up with hardships and challenges in establishing the principle of Bhakta-Bhagwan taught by Bhagwan Swaminarayan. With practically no resources of money, grains, stones and people Shastriji Maharaj boldly and faithfully established five towering mandirs for the perpetuation of true *upasana* and bhakti. The *shikharbaddh* mandirs at Bochasan, Sarangpur, Gondal, Atladra and Gadhada marked the crucial, formative and historic years of the BAPS. Nirgun Swami, Yogiji Maharaj, Ashabhai, Ishwarbhai, Motibhai Bhagwandas, Keshavlal Pragji, Girdharbhai and many more were the pillars of BAPS during these early years.

Later, when Yogiji Maharaj succeeded as guru he furthered the growth of the organization through his untiring efforts, love and saintliness. He established the children's forum, youth forum, Sunday *satsang* assemblies, initiated educated youths into sadhus and consecrated mandirs in East Africa and London, UK.

Today, Pramukh Swami Maharaj has in the last three-and-a-half decades, placed the BAPS on the world map. Through his amazing *vicharan* he has consecrated a record-breaking 713

First BAPS Mandir in Bochasan; Shri Akshar-Purushottam Maharaj, Bochasan; Shastriji Maharaj, founder of BAPS





mandirs, initiated over 780 youths as sadhus and inspired a volunteer force of 55,000 selfless youths. In tandem with the spiritual activities Swamishri serves society through the organization's health services, educational activities, relief work, tribal uplift, character-building in children and youths and other socio-spiritual activities.

The Centenary Celebrations inspired and emboldened one and all with pride, spirit of service, endeavour and self-improvement.

Thirteen-year-old Utsav Garach from Sydney, Australia, describes what he learnt from the celebrations, "The inspiration I got from this Mahotsav is that nothing is impossible. Bapa has made 713 mandirs, and loving and caring facilities like hospitals and schools around the world."

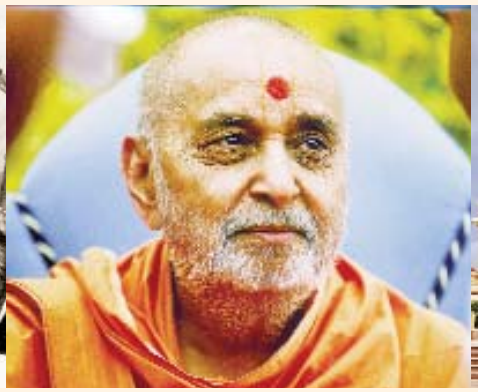
An event management expert and graduate from the prestigious CEPT institute of architecture in Ahmedabad, Miss Krishna Varma, writes, "The set (stage) of 350 ft width and some 51 ft in height, gave a very grand image with the huge scale. Taking into consideration the number of viewers, over a lakh people everyday, it was on a perfect scale. The symmetrical look of the stage, with equal dimensions and scale on both sides, gave a fantastic look. "

Tarun Vijay, an acclaimed writer, thinker and editor of *Panchajanya,* writes during his visit, "Everything is alive here. Everyone has a smile and the volunteers are humble, which is an important quality of spirituality. The Centenary programmes should be staged in the United Nations. Everything was perfect. There was military precision. The mass *arti* on the last day was incredible!"

This special issue on the BAPS Centenary Celebrations provides details about the four-day event, the preparation, effort and devotion of thousands of sadhus and volunteers, an insight into its planning and magnitude, and the divine inspiration of Pramukh Swami Maharaj. We hope this special issue will bring forth memories and inspirations for those who were present, and an inkling of the celebrations' glory and purpose to those who would be thumbing through the pages for the first time.

◆

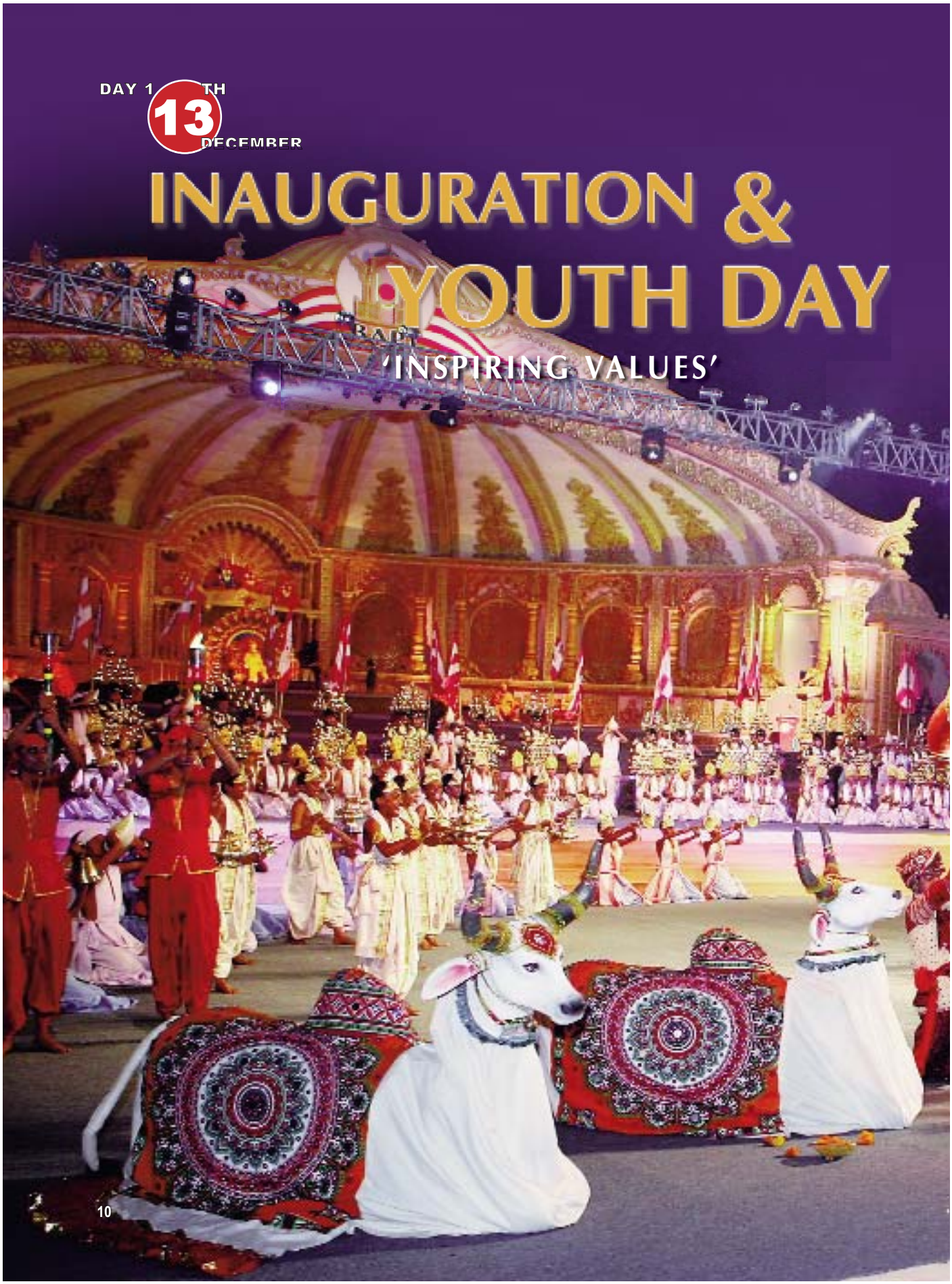
Yogiji Maharaj founded Children and Youth Forums; Pramukh Swami Maharaj, inspirer of Akshardham



DAY 1 — 13TH DECEMBER

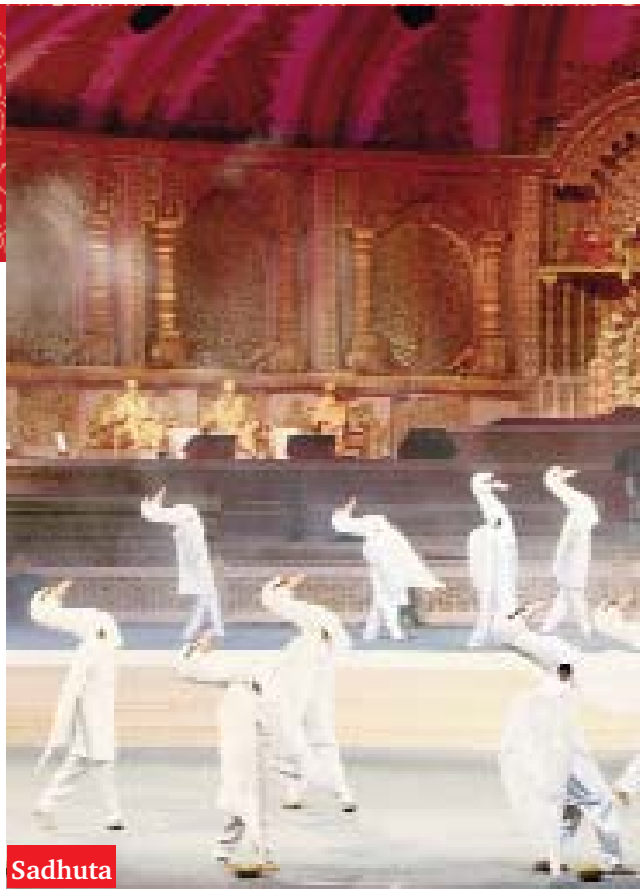
INAUGURATION & YOUTH DAY

'INSPIRING VALUES'



On 13 December 2007 the four-day BAPS Centenary Celebrations began with a dazzling and devotional inauguration ceremony coupled with the celebration of BAPS Youth Day based on the theme 'Inspiring Values'. The celebration, at the specially created 321-acre Swaminarayan Nagar in Ahmedabad's Chandkheda suburb on the Sabarmati-Gandhinagar highway, featured a spectacular cultural programme with 500 youths performing on a 350-ft stage to the delight of over 65,000 devotees and guests.

Siddhant



Sadhuta

Inauguration Ceremony – 'Values of BAPS'

The programme commenced with a dance by BAPS youths waving the flags of countries where the 3300 BAPS centres around the world are located. The inauguration ceremony, themed 'Values of BAPS', emphasized that BAPS is founded on the values taught by Bhagwan Swaminarayan and his succession of spiritual gurus. A 45-minute cultural programme of lively dances, songs and enlightening commentary symbolically highlighted six of the values that have shaped BAPS and inspired millions through the last century. Using an array of hundreds of spectacular props and costumes, over 500 youths presented the following enduring values:

1. Siddhant (Principle)

BAPS is founded on the pillars of the principle of Akshar-Purushottam in accordance with Hindu shastras. This principle was depicted by a unique dance using sculpted pillars.

2. Sadhuta (Saintliness)

Refraining from harmful actions, speech and thought and wishing well even for those who cause harm is the saintliness that is a foundational value of BAPS. It was depicted by a graceful dance of pure-white swans symbolizing pristine saintliness.

3. Seva (Service)

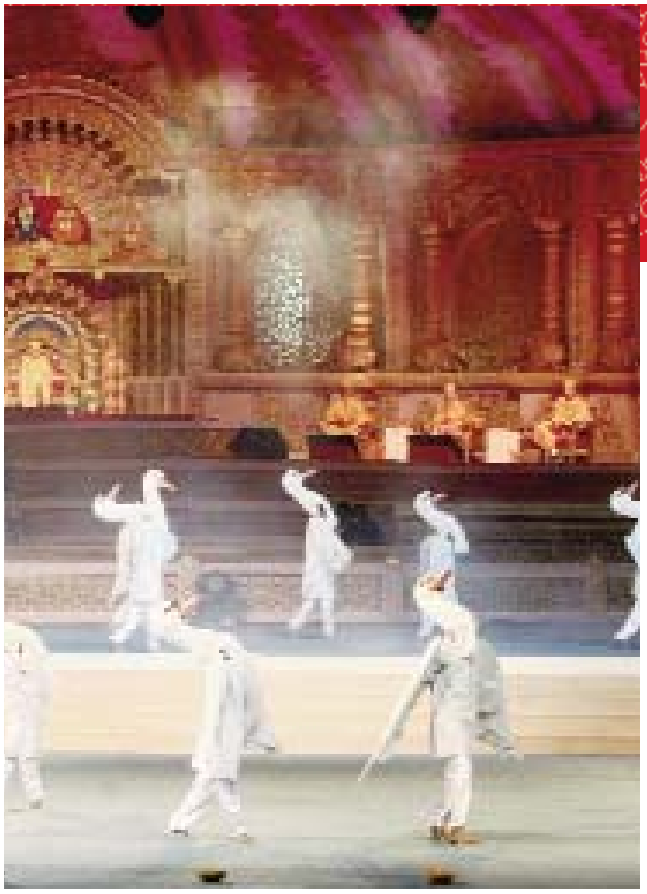
Selfless service, devoid of ego, is another value of BAPS. This was shown through a unique sweepers' dance by youths offering service with wicker baskets *(topla)* and brooms *(savarna)*.

4. Samarpan (Sacrifice)

Self-sacrifice, another foundational value of BAPS, was depicted by a dance of life-like oxen, symbolic of selfless sacrifice.

5. Samp (Unity)

The power of BAPS lies in its unity. Despite



Seva

its great number of members and widely spread diaspora, BAPS is one family. This value was depicted by a vibrant dance portraying the story of the unity of doves.

6. Satpurush (God-Realized Guru)

All the values of BAPS are embodied by the Satpurush (Guru) within whom God is ever-present. Through him they are nourished in aspirants. This value was celebrated with a *deepa*-dance, ending in Pramukh Swami Maharaj lighting a lamp to officially inaugurate the celebrations.

BAPS Youth Day Celebration

After the inauguration ceremony the BAPS Youth Day celebrations commenced with the theme of 'Inspiring Values'.

The Character of BAPS Youths

The first part of the BAPS Youth Day programme asserted that, through its core moral values, its social and cultural activities, and the spiritual inspiration of its gurus, BAPS has nurtured character in youths to serve as ideal members of society. This was demonstrated through a series of real-life incidents of BAPS youths from around the world.

Highlighting the value of honesty was Dhulabhai Patel of Ahmedabad who returned Rs. 50,000 that he found on the road, although he desperately required Rs. 10,000 for his daughter's wedding.

A similar incident showed Kantibhai Darji of Mumbai returning Rs. 83,000 he found on the street while on his way to collect a loan of Rs. 10,000 for his urgent cataract operation.

In addition to moral rectitude, some incidents showed BAPS youth maintaining spiritual rituals and traditions in extreme circumstances.

Sanjay Kara of London maintained his daily rituals of bathing, puja, *arti* and religious discourses even while climbing Mt. Everest.

Virendra Patel of Dallas, USA, maintained his

"Unforgettable experience in my lifetime... All time great event it was... unbelievable and yet seeing and witnessing it happening in front of my eyes! Just fabulous." - Subodh Adeshara, Commissioner, FDA, Gujarat State

Samp

Samarpan

Satpurush

promise to guru Yogiji Maharaj to remain vegetarian while defending his country for eight years as a soldier in the Rhodesian Civil War, even if it meant not eating for three to four days at a stretch.

Details of these stories are on page 18.

BAPS Youths with Inspiring Values

The second part of the Youth Day programme showed that BAPS encourages youths to strive for overall excellence. A series of inspiring real-life accounts revealed that BAPS youths who have attained social, educational, and professional excellence use their abilities to selflessly serve family and society.

Dixit Patel of London, a promising graphic design student, sacrificed his place at a premier college to serve his ailing mother.

Amar Parekh, an Oxford University engineer from London, has volunteered 3000 hours to offer educational and career-skills assistance to 500 needy youths.

Ritesh Gadhia of New Delhi, an MBA graduate of IIM Bangalore, has forsaken a lucrative salary to dedicate his life to honorary social services, perhaps the first such student in IIM's history.

Sanjay Parikh of Ahmedabad, an M.Tech graduate from IIT Kanpur, has dedicated his life to honorary social service and promotion of cultural heritage by building schools, hospitals, villages, mandirs and cultural centres worldwide.

Dr Madhav Jodhani, an acclaimed eye surgeon of Ahmedabad, has performed thousands of free eye operations for needy patients in remote areas.

Dr Raghavji Bhuva of Bhavnagar has inspired more than 7000 people to give up destructive addictions.

For details see page 21.

"It was a very inspiring and motivating presentation organized by BAPS. The BAPS is contributing toward character-building and ethics in society. It is essential for progress of the country." - C.P. Singh, DG & IGP (Ret'd)

Unity Dance

Torchbearers of Transformation

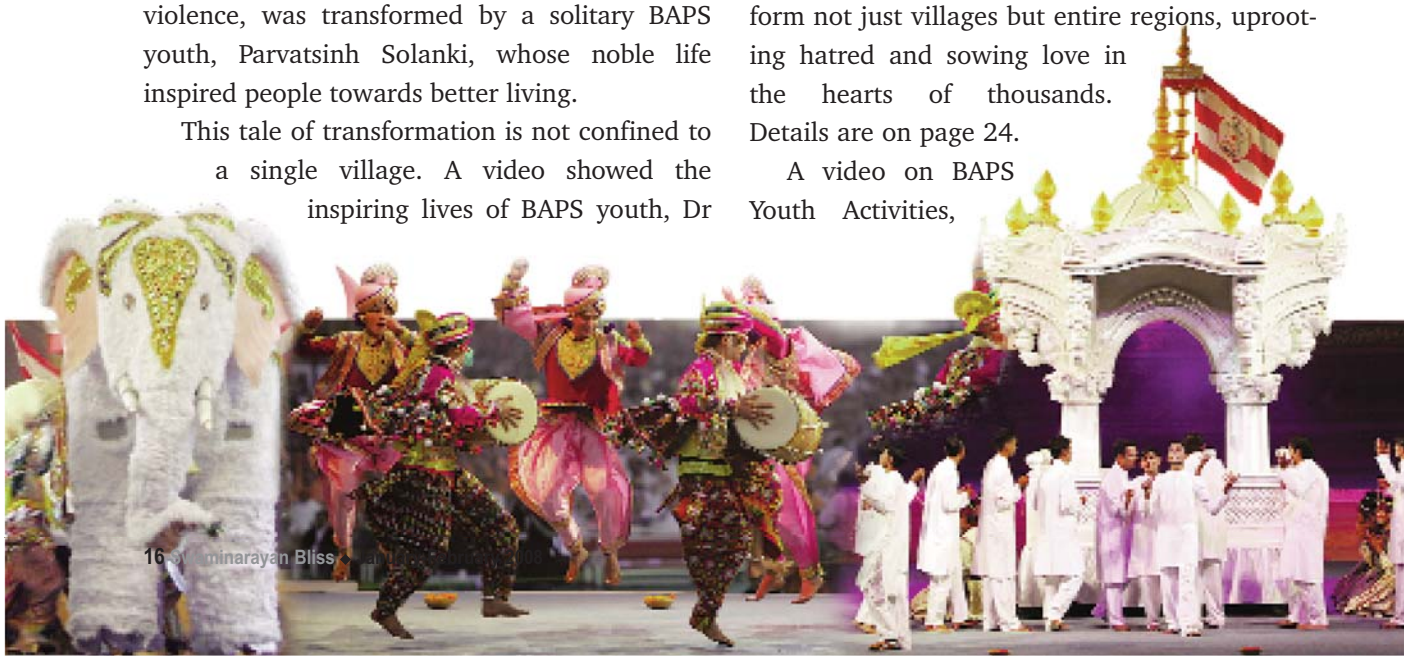
The third part of the Youth Day programme included dramas, videos, and personal testimonies showing that through purity of character BAPS youths have inspired transformations in individuals, communities and society.

A short drama, 'Eke Hajara', depicted how the village of Nava Samera, mired in addictions and violence, was transformed by a solitary BAPS youth, Parvatsinh Solanki, whose noble life inspired people towards better living.

This tale of transformation is not confined to a single village. A video showed the inspiring lives of BAPS youth, Dr Pathubhai Desai of Sunsar village, Sarpanch Dahyabhai Solanki of Petli and Raychand Darbar of Kosumkuva – all of whom have also entirely transformed their villages.

The story of IPS officer Yashwant Jethwa, a youth raised from childhood in the BAPS tradition, showed how, in the face of Naxalite militancy, his deep-rooted values helped to transform not just villages but entire regions, uprooting hatred and sowing love in the hearts of thousands. Details are on page 24.

A video on BAPS Youth Activities,



Enactment of the story of Kantibhai Darji

'The Spirit of Selfless Service', showed that BAPS youths also offer millions of hours of selfless service in countless humanitarian projects.

The 'Ekta' (Unity) dance depicted that despite different socio-economic, educational, and national backgrounds, such modern-day miracles were possible because BAPS youths are united under one guru, one philosophy and one goal.

Finally, a video titled, 'Swamishri and Youths' showed that Pramukh Swami Maharaj is the inspiring force behind BAPS youths. By nurturing the youths with selfless love he has elevated them to greater heights.

The three-hour programme was capped with the blessings of Pramukh Swami Maharaj, who said, "God has graced us by giving us a human body. Through this body we are able to perform noble deeds and liberate our soul. This is the reason for righteous living... It is man's obligation to have love for each other and to help one another while simultaneously understanding God's greatness, offering devotion, and living in accordance with God's wishes. Living a life without *niyams* is not purposeful. Progress can only be achieved where there is continuity and consistency."

The programme concluded with a spectacular fireworks display.

CHARACTER

DEVOTEES FELICITATED FOR INTEGRITY

HONESTY
Dhulabhai Patel

On 12 January 2007, Dhulabhai Patel, a dedicated BAPS devotee and teacher at C.N. Vidyalaya in Ahmedabad, found Rs. 50,000 in cash lying on the road. At that time, he was in desperate need of some money to help finance his daughter's marriage, which was only a fortnight away.

Despite such trying times, Dhulabhai resisted the temptation, with the thought that he was a devotee of Pramukh Swami Maharaj and so it was his duty to return the money to its rightful owner.

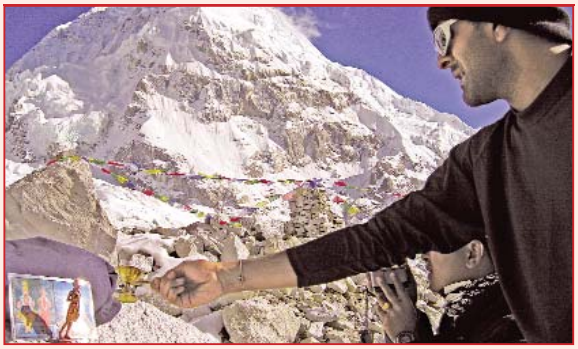
Hence, he went to the home of Hardik Gandhi and returned the money. Hardik was relieved to receive his lost money, and was overwhelmed by Dhulabhai's honesty. Expressing his heartfelt gratitude, Hardik wrote a letter to Dhulabhai, in which he stated, 'You are a modern-day angel'.

RESISTING TEMPTATION
Kantibhai Darji

Kantibhai Darji is an insurance agent who lives in Mumbai. Doctors advised him to have a cataract operation, which would cost him Rs. 10,000. Being a man of ordinary means, this was a large amount for him and so he asked for a loan from his friends. He was walking along Ranisati Road in Mumbai towards his friend's house to collect the money when, amid the crowded street he saw a bulky wallet fall from the back pocket of a person ahead of him. The wallet contained Rs. 83,000 and belonged to a Marathi youth named Anand Matar.

Quickly, Kantibhai picked up the wallet, ran after Anand and returned it to him. Anand was surprised by Kantibhai's honesty and offered Rs. 5000 as a reward. Kantibhai refused. Even when Anand insisted, asking him to take it as a gift from a friend for his operation, Kantibhai refused, stating, "For me there is no greater reward than the blessings of my guru Pramukh Swami Maharaj."

Kantibhai is an example of the thousands of honest BAPS devotees inspired by Pramukh Swami Maharaj.



HIMALAYAN DEVOTION
Sanjay Kara

Many have attempted to climb the Himalayas, but what made this journey special was its social and spiritual dimension. Sanjay Kara climbed to raise funds for cancer research and to get a rare spiritual experience.

Q: At 18,000 ft, the trek to the Mt. Everest base camp is very dangerous. The trail is littered with the graves of those who have perished on the climb. Didn't the thought occur to you – What if I die?

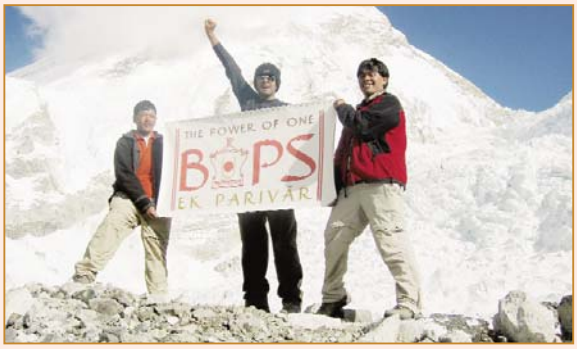
A: Oh definitely. I had my fears. You hear of experienced trekkers losing limbs to frostbite or dying from altitude sickness. Well, I'm not a trekker. Nor am I exceptionally fit. Twice, I narrowly escaped fatal falls. But at every step, I remembered the childhood image of Bhagwan Swaminarayan – young Nilkanth Varni, scaling the Himalayas, alone, at 11 years of age, in the *Mystic India* film. This gave me the courage to face my fears.

While the fear of death remained in the back of my mind, my most difficult challenge was doing my daily puja in the extreme conditions of Mt. Everest.

Daily puja meant waking up an hour early, breaking out of the layer of ice encasing my sleeping bag, and taking a sponge bath in the snow outside. But it was worth it. It was a deep spiritual experience and I was encouraged by Bapa's letter.

Q: What was your most exhilarating experience on Mt. Everest?

A: On Everest, where walking was difficult, where even breathing was a challenge; at that time, when I lit the *arti* and sang it, it was the most exhilarating experience. Imagine being on Everest and remembering Maharaj, Swami and all the devotees of BAPS.



CHARACTER

Fulfilling a Promise
Virendra Patel

"My name is Virendra Patel. For eight long years, I fought on the front-lines in the Rhodesian civil war.

It was horrific guerilla warfare. Fifty thousand were killed, including many close friends. We were constantly chased by the fear of death. The sweltering heat of the dense jungles, and carrying heavy gear over rugged terrain completely drained us.

Food was scarce. Rations would sometimes be air-dropped to us. However, I faced a challenge unlike that of any other soldier.

Years ago, I had promised my guru, Yogiji Maharaj, that I would remain vegetarian. So, I survived mostly off the land, scavenging for roots and wild fruit. Sometimes, I went without food for three to four days, just to maintain my promise to remain vegetarian.

In the first six weeks, I lost 14 kg. But my promise to my guru was my strength – reinforced daily as I turned the *mala* that he had given me many years ago.

When I was a child, Yogiji Maharaj had visited our home in Africa. Although our family had lived outside India for four generations, Yogiji Maharaj's love initiated me into Indian culture and *satsang*.

In 1960 Yogiji Maharaj asked our family to regularly hold a weekly Sunday assembly at our house. At Yogiji Maharaj's word we continued the Sunday assembly in the remote village of Gatoma for more than 40 years, even if it meant just the three of us, all family members.

This gave me the strength to remain true to my faith and preserve my cultural values which I have been able to pass on to my children.

I consider my whole family blessed. When a great sadhu holds your hand, he never lets it go. My final meeting with Yogiji Maharaj was extraordinary. I sought his blessings, asking, 'When would I be able to come back again for his darshan?' He told me to meet Pramukh Swami in the future. Not only did a great God-realized Sadhu hold my hand in good and bad times, but he introduced me to another God-realized Sadhu, who walks with me and still holds my hand today."

VALUES

YOUTHS AND DEVOTEES FELICITATED FOR OUTSTANDING SERVICES TO SOCIETY

SERVITUDE TO PARENTS
Dixit Patel

The true identity of BAPS youths is their value-based life. In addition to their academic and professional achievements, they dedicate their knowledge and skills in selflessly serving others. They place values before status or fame.

Seven years ago, Dixit Patel, a BAPS youth from London, fulfilled his dream by gaining admission to the prestigious Ravensborne University to study Graphic Design & Photography.

Sadly, shortly afterwards, his mother became permanently paralysed from the waist down and so became confined to a wheelchair. Dixit had two choices: serve his mother or concentrate on his career. He selflessly chose the former with the spirit of *'Mãtru devo bhavah'*, sacrificing his promising career prospects.

He cooked the meals and did all the household chores. After two years of such full-time service, circumstances allowed him to begin part-time studies at East London University. But he still continues to serve his mother.

EDUCATING OTHERS
Amar Parekh

Amar Parekh graduated from Oxford University with a first class master's degree in Electronics and Information Engineering. Since then, he has used his knowledge to help others progress in studies and at work.

For the past seven years he has served in this way. Not only does he not take any fees for his guidance, but he often spends his own money to help. He frequently stays up till 2.00 am to listen to and help youths solve their problems.

In an age where time really is money, Amar has selflessly dedicated 3000 hours of service to help over 500 youths. He has also developed an education guidance team of 20 BAPS youths throughout the UK.

With his guidance and motivation, over 100 youths have secured jobs in internationally reputed companies.

VALUES

IIM Graduate Volunteer
Ritesh Gadhia

IIT Engineer Volunteer
Sanjay Parikh

The Indian Institutes of Management (IIMs) are among the best business schools in the world. MBA graduates from any IIM are in high demand and command high salaries.

Ritesh Gadhia is a BAPS youth who is an MBA from IIM Bangalore. Like his colleagues, he too could have earned more than Rs. 80-90 lakh per annum. However, he shunned such lucrative offers and chose to join the BAPS as a full-time volunteer, serving in a variety of projects for the past nine years.

Perhaps, for the first time in IIM history, one of their MBA graduates has sacrificed the lure of riches and high status to selflessly serve society.

The Indian Institutes of Technology are among the best engineering and technology institutes in the world. Sanjay Parikh, a BAPS youth who graduated with an M.Tech in Civil Engineering (Foundation Technology) from IIT in Kanpur, scored 9.7 out of 10 and was first in his class.

Responding to the wish of Pramukh Swami Maharaj, Sanjay sacrificed the chance to earn huge salaries and joined as a full-time BAPS volunteer. Leading a simple life for the past 18 years he has endured hunger, thirst and other hardships to serve day and night for the welfare of others.

He has played a major role in the construction of 50 educational campuses, 9 student hostels, 2 large hospitals, 24 spiritual and cultural complexes. Under his supervision, 6 villages and 3 large colonies destroyed in the Gujarat Earthquake of 2001 were rebuilt. Among these is the village of Narayannagar, recently honoured by the Government of India as a model village.

Free Surgery for the Needy
Dr Madhav Jodhani

Dr Madhav Jodhani of Ahmedabad is a dedicated BAPS devotee and an experienced eye surgeon. From Pramukh Swami Maharaj he has learnt that the primary duty of a doctor is to serve the needy.

Today, a cataract operation costs around Rs. 5000. Dr Jodhani has arranged many camps to perform cataract operations for the needy, free of charge – not only in Gujarat, but also in Bihar and in Africa.

To date, he has performed around 55,000 cataract operations free of charge, amounting to millions of rupees in monetary terms.

Dr Jodhani's inspiration to serve is derived from Pramukh Swami Maharaj.

De-addicting Thousands
Dr Raghavji Bhuva

A highly respected physician of Bhavnagar, Gujarat, Dr Bhuva combines medical practice with his ongoing drive to free people of their addictions. He maintains a register of his efforts to de-addict people from their various vices.

He describes the damaging consequences of indulging in addictions and prays for the addicts, thus inspiring them to shed their addictive habits and adopt a healthier lifestyle. He also advises them to regularly visit the mandir for darshan and seek the guidance of sadhus.

Over the years, he has personally inspired over 7000 people to overcome their addictions.

INSPIRING VALUES

BAPS DEVOTEES TRANSFORM VILLAGES

IPS Officer Restores Law and Order

Yashwant Jethwa

"The preachings of Pramukh Swami Maharaj and the lessons learnt since childhood in the BAPS family made me realize that the answer lay not in bullet for bullet, not in terror for terror, but in doing what Swamiji would do. The answer lay in spreading love and not hatred; in reaching out to the estranged folks and winning their hearts; in bridging the deep divide between the community and the police.

And I tried to do what Swamiji would do and what the BAPS had taught me to do. We reached out to them. We sang with them and made them sing with us. We smiled with them and made them smile with us. We went nearer to them and brought them closer to us.

Swami Bapa and the teachings of BAPS were a guiding pole star, they kept showing me the way in the darkness. The guiding principle was, 'Do what Swamiji would do'. We listened to their problems, we empathized with their needs, we created a bond of trust and faith and took them on our side in the battle against the Naxalites. And it worked like nothing else had ever worked. This alternative approach to policing gave us rich dividends. More than 40 hard core Naxalites were nabbed and many more weaned away from the path of Naxalism.

We tried for reform and not punishment, and we did win the battle of bullets by this formula of love and bonding. The result: while other parts surrounding my jurisdiction burned under the fire of Naxal terror, my area remained calm and free of Naxal violence.

We carried out awareness drives against drug addiction and intoxication, dowry and torture of women, and other evils through street plays conducted by police personnel. The message was sent to nearly a lakh people in this drive.

Swamiji and BAPS have always been a driving force in my professional pursuits, helping me excel over other international police officers in a test conducted by the United Nations during an International Police Training in Italy recently. It got me an award for outstanding police service from the Honourable Governor of Orissa on Republic Day 2007."

Addiction-free Village
Raychand Darbar of Kosumkuva

The tribal village of Kosumkuva in the district of Valsad was plagued with superstitions, addictions and poverty. Children had little scope for education and women remained ignorant. Land was mortgaged to pay for the extravagant drinking and meat-eating during marriages.

In such circumstances, the efforts of Raychand brought about a miraculous change. Having been blessed by Pramukh Swami Maharaj, he accepted the vows of BAPS *satsang* and began to teach them to others.

The result: today, the entire Kolcha community has given up drinking. And without performing morning puja, none drink even a drop of water.

Through Raychand's efforts, the living standard of the villagers and their faith in God has been raised.

Such transformations have been effected in over 800 tribal villages throughout Gujarat by BAPS sadhus and volunteers.

Promoting Anti-addiction and Literacy
Parvatsinh Solanki of Samera

Samera village in the Meghraj sub-district of Sabarkantha district was steeped in addictions and illiteracy.

It was a village where vices and bad habits were the norm.

However, with the arrival of Parvatsinh, a BAPS devotee, changes occurred. He inspired the villagers to live by the values of *satsang*.

The lives of the villagers were transformed. They shed their past improper ways and embraced a virtuous life.

Today, over 98% of villagers are addiction-free, the literacy rate has dramatically improved and the education level has risen – with 10 youths pursuing university degrees. Even among the women, literacy has greatly increased.

Such has been the wholesome impact of Parvatsinh's efforts that there has not been a single court case in the village for a long time.

INSPIRING VALUES

Teaching Values
Pathubhai Desai of Sunsar

For 100 years, the village of Sunsar in Mahesana district had been submerged in gambling, drinking, stealing and other vices. It was as if such vices were the main occupation of the villagers. Even the police had difficulty controlling the criminal elements in the village.

Several reputable social workers had earnestly attempted to reform the villagers from their immoral ways, but without success.

However, from 1998, the efforts of BAPS volunteer, Pathubhai, began to make a difference. Teaching the values of BAPS, the habits of the villagers began to change. They adopted virtuous lifestyles, shunning their wayward past, and engaged in regular devotion and service to God. As a result they have been redeemed from poverty and through legitimate endeavours are now financially sound.

Initially, Pathubhai faced threats from the villagers, but he faithfully persisted. Now, the atmosphere has taken such a turnaround that a mandir is being built by the villagers.

Even the police are grateful to Pramukh Swami Maharaj and BAPS for the transformation.

Creating a Model Village
Dahyabhai Parmar of Petli

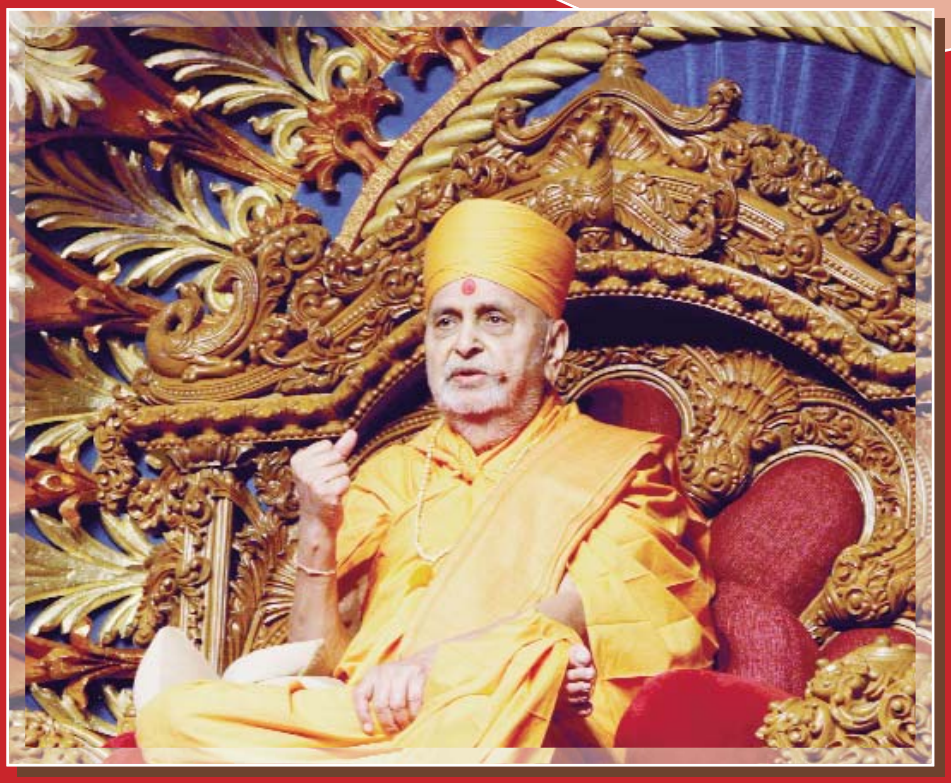
Elected when he was only 21 years old, Dahyabhai Parmar has served as the Sarpanch (head) of Petli village in Anand district for 28 years.

Raised in the BAPS tradition, Dahyabhai has served with humility and dedication to ensure the progress of the village.

Through his efforts, Petli has been honoured as a 'Model Village'. For the past 20 years, the police have not had to take any actions, such are the honest ways of the villagers.

Under Dahyabhai's leadership and active participation, the village has prospered in terms of infrastructure, hygiene, cleanliness, education, and other facilities.

Despite his respected status, Dahyabhai is often found cleaning the streets of the village. Such values, inspired by Pramukh Swami Maharaj, are the foundation from which the village of Petli has prospered.



SWAMISHRI'S BLESSINGS

Youth Day

"Thanks to all of you who have gathered here from all over India and abroad in great numbers. Inspite of your work, job or business, you all have an understanding to further strengthen devotion in your lives, and for that reason all of you have come here.

Shastriji Maharaj is at the root of these celebrations. Today, this Sanstha has completed 100 years and for that reason all this planning has been done, and in accordance with that planning, this celebration has begun.

Bhagwan Shriji Maharaj came down from Akshardham with an auspicious wish. The wishes of God and Satpurush are always good that may each person be happy, may each and everyone be redeemed, and may everyone in their own personal worldly life become prosperous. For this reason, and so that everyone can obtain the knowledge of Akshar-Purushottam, Shriji Maharaj came down with his abode, Akshar, and started all this work.

"Sampradays exist so people can offer their devotion to God and attain liberation, but each Sampraday's foundation is based on righteousness. Until a person does not live righteously he cannot be called a human."

Shriji Maharaj has never discriminated on the basis of caste, creed or religion. His message was that a person should simply follow his religion and piously worship whomever he has faith in. And that is why he himself had written a scripture known as the Shikshapatri. He has given 212 moral codes of conduct in the form of these verses and has especially written, *Dharmogneyah sadãchãrah* – Know dharma to be virtuous living.

Shriji Maharaj has written in accordance with what has been said in the Shruti and Smruti shastras, that righteousness (*sadachar*) is dharma. Sampradays exist so people can offer their devotion to God and attain liberation, but each Sampraday's foundation is based on righteousness. Until a person does not live righteously he cannot be called a human. *Dharmena hinã pashubhi narãnãm* – one who does not observe morality is merely an animal in the form of a human.

Just as a person needs food and sleep, an animal needs food and sleep. Just as people marry and have children, animals also raise children. There is absolutely no difference between these basic activities of humans and animals. But we have obtained a priceless and invaluable human body: *Durlabho mãnusho deho, dehinãm, kshanbhangurah.* God has graced us by giving us a human body. Through this body we are able to perform noble deeds and liberate our soul. This is the reason for righteous living. *Sad* means good – not being the cause of another person's misery, problems or frustrations.

People live their life, animals live their life, and we too live our life. It is a human obligation to have love for each other and to help one another, while simultaneously understanding God's greatness, offering devotion, and living in accordance with God's messages. Living a life without *niyams* is not purposeful. Progress can only be achieved where there is continuity and consistency. A small tree needs to be regularly given water and other nutrients. Similarly, one can progress by studying regularly. There can be no progress if we follow one *niyam* today and don't follow that *niyam* tomorrow. Thus, whoever lives his life in accordance with Shriji Maharaj's words becomes happy in this world.

We just saw in the presentations by the youths that in their lives they have righteousness, faith in God, and are in the company of a true Sadhu. If we do not have such company how can we understand why we are here? If we walk the same path as the great people who have lived a true life, as Shriji Maharaj has explained, then we will obtain peace and happiness. For this, the Shikshapatri is extremely valuable and its daily study is necessary as well.

Shriji Maharaj has instructed all to read the Shikshapatri daily. We have to live our life based on what is said in the scriptures, and understand the greatness of God and the Satpurush. No religion or shastra has placed a restriction on fulfilling worldly duties and obligations. But because we have attained this human body we also need to liberate our soul. Have firm faith in God, take refuge in him only, and act accordingly. Then only will we be able to progress and become happy.

Today we saw through various presentations

just how much youths have progressed, how many people they have freed from addictions, and how many people they have inspired spiritually. We just heard from (Yashwant) Jethwa. From childhood he used to come to *bal mandal*. If from the beginning children are given values such as not doing anything wrong, not stealing, serving parents, and offering devotion to God then those values become firm. He used to stay in a 12-foot room in Mumbai, and he has progressed because of his faith and attendance in *bal mandal.* He thought that even though his own life is pure, how can others have a good life as well. And for that he worked. He improved everyone. From the Sampraday's values he realized how he could improve. But he worked on the basis of the Sampraday's principles, which is why he progressed.

Many people say that how can we benefit by doing all this? But there is a great benefit. Because of his firmness in following *niyams* and dharma he was able to move forward and even now, since he has inner strength and courage his work is still progressing. There are countless incidents such as these that by practising *satsang* all our *niyams* are preserved and we obtain happiness by following them.

There is nothing wrong in becoming wealthy, but by simultaneously keeping faith in God and following the given *niyams* the strength of our soul increases, and because of this one is able to perform good deeds.

Many people say that success is due to their own brain and strength, but that is not true. Nothing is ours. Whatever intelligence, strength, and talent we have, whatever we are able to do, is all because of God. And only because of God we have intelligence and are able to act. But people think, "I did that", but we cannot do anything. God resides within us and through his inspiration everything is possible. Arjun was told in the Gita by Lord Krishna, "Because of me you are able to act, so take refuge in me and do what I say." We can only advance in life if we act according to the *niyams* given by God and the messages propounded by the Satpurush. One should never forget one's goal in the midst of worldly activities: with this body I want to do only that which pleases God and liberates my soul. Difficulties will arise but we need to have the strength of God. Without God nothing can be done. All this work is being done because we are taking the strength of God.

Shriji Maharaj has come down with a resolute wish that everyone becomes happy. Thereafter Gunatitanand Swami, Bhagatji Maharaj, Shastriji Maharaj and Yogiji Maharaj have tolerated hardships and have preached the true message to everyone. Whoever has lived according to this message has become happy and will become happy.

If we are firm in our *niyams* and dharma, if we are united in our work, then we will surely become successful in whatever we do. Let us pray that God gives the strength to all for that."

◆

DAY 2 14TH DECEMBER

WOMEN'S DAY

'EMPOWERING WOMEN'

Based on the theme 'Empowering Women', BAPS Women's Wing celebrated Women's Day on 14 December as part of the BAPS Centenary Celebrations. Specially created skits, dances, lectures and presentations were performed by BAPS women volunteers aged between 5 and 75. An international audience of thousands viewed the programme.

"The presentations truly expressed the conviction of BAPS women. The organization, content, and the conduct were tremendous, done very professionally." - Aditi G Patel, Student, Drexel University

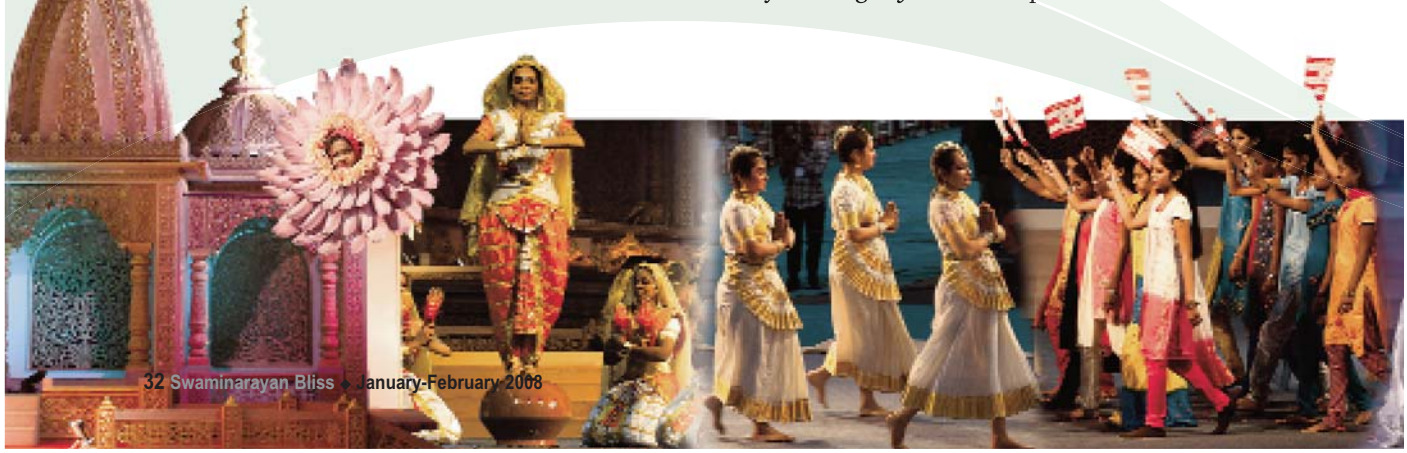
Bhakti Yatra

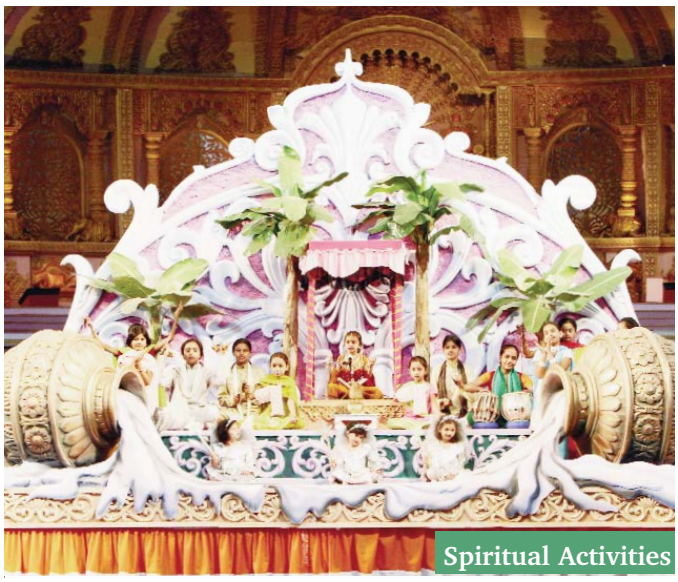
The programme began at 5.30 pm with the singing of Vedic mantras praying for world peace. Thereafter, a magnificent parade, called Bhakti Yatra, with beautifully decorated floats rolled across the stage. Each float represented a different activity of BAPS and the principles of Bhagwan Swaminarayan: cultural preservation, health awareness, education awareness, social work, family unity and spiritual progress. Each float also had up to 50 girls in full traditional costume waving flags, dancing and acting.

Next was a drama depicting the work of Bhagwan Swaminarayan for the uplift of women. It focused on the social activities carried out by Bhagwan Swaminarayan and his sadhus two hundred years ago.

This was followed by felicitation of BAPS women from around the world for their notable achievements: Sejal Patel (USA), a senior consultant at McKinsey & Company (USA) who sponsored her to do an MBA at Harvard Business School. She described how Pramukh Swami Maharaj's blessings and *satsang* have helped her throughout her personal and professional life.

Meera Amin was in the US Marines. Amid the most difficult military training, she abided by *satsang niyams* and spiritual traditions.





Spiritual Activities

Education

Dr Upasana Patel stood first in the 12th Science Gujarat Board Exams. She was a 10th Standard Board ranker as well. Currently she is doing her internship at the B.J. Medical College, Ahmedabad. She narrated her story of how the blessings of Pramukh Swami Maharaj lifted her out of depression during the Board exams. (Details on page 35.)

An inspiring video presentation on 'Developing the Leader of Tomorrow' was shown to promote and encourage women to scale new heights and break barriers.

After this, the work done by BAPS women volunteers in the rehabilitation of thousands of women affected by the 2001 Gujarat Earthquake and 2004 South Asian Tsunami was presented. Then, a video and drama presentation highlighted the work of BAPS women volunteers to empower tribal women in the backward areas of Gujarat, helping to transform their lives through the ideals taught by Bhagwan Swaminarayan.

Following the Navdha Bhakti dance, portraying the nine forms of devotion, was an inspiring skit emphasizing the importance of conducting a daily Family Assembly.

Next was a touching performance based on a true event. It showed a mother writing a letter to her son encouraging him to become a sadhu

"The hundreds of mandals, mandirs, and Swaminarayan events around the world would not be possible without the contribution of women and girls. I strongly feel that it is the women and girls who are at the vanguard of BAPS." - Dr Hanna Kim

Spiritual Progress

Family Unity

and give his life in service to society under the wings of Pramukh Swami Maharaj. It also paid tribute to the over 785 mothers who have given their beloved sons to become BAPS sadhus under Pramukh Swami Maharaj.

This was followed by a singing of the famous prayer, *"Mahãbalvant mãyã tamãri…"*, originally sung by the women devotees of Bhagwan Swaminarayan.

Then Hanna Kim, a professor of anthropology at Columbia University, shared her views about the BAPS Women's Wing.

The programme concluded with the Kankavati Dance, a grand dance performed by over 450 young women in celebration of the BAPS Centenary, and the offering of Guru Vandana.

SPIRITUAL FAITH

STORIES OF FAITH AND SUCCESS

Divine Blessings and Guidance

Sejal Patel, Houston, USA

"The driving force behind everything I do is simple yet powerful: to fulfil Pramukh Swami Maharaj's wishes. Even though it was nearly 10 years ago I will never forget hearing Swamishri's blessings for my education and for my career.

Hearing Swamishri's words I was so eager to please him, but I was unsure of how I could possibly meet such ambitious goals. The answer lay in one thing: by living by Swamishri's words I felt his presence with me at all times – through every challenge and through every success.

However, a year after I received his blessings I was very disappointed. I graduated third, not first, in my high school class. At that time I doubted myself but I kept my faith in Swamishri and that gave me even more determination to fulfil his wishes during my college years.

My class at Vanderbilt University had over one thousand students and I had to get a perfect score in forty classes to make Swamishri's blessings become a reality. I studied hard but my efforts could only take me so far. When I did graduate number one in my college class, I knew that only Swamishri could make something like this happen. After I graduated, Swamishri again conveyed his guidance to take a consulting job at McKinsey & Company, which is the world's top management consultant firm. Now this was a challenge, consultants are required to travel and to wine and dine with their clients in order to be successful. I thought, 'How can I possibly take such a job without sacrificing my beliefs.' All I could do was trust Swamishri and sure enough he was there for me at every single step.

When I was travelling every week, it was often difficult because I lived on plain salads and I had to meet with high level executives. Each time they questioned my religious diet and my non-drinking habit, because this was uncommon in the business world. At those times Swamishri gave me the internal courage to explain my *niyams,* dharma, and beliefs with confidence and pride.

In times like these Swamishri helps us to progress in our careers and also keeps us strong in our *satsang*. Today, I sit as one of the youngest students in my class at Harvard Business School just as Swamishri had said nearly 10 years ago.

I cannot imagine being here without Swamishri. Fulfilling his wishes has not been easy but one thing is for sure: everytime we put Swamishri first our self doubts just disappear and we somehow truly can do the unimaginable."

SPIRITUAL FAITH

Steadfast in Niyams
Meera Amin, L.A., USA

Q: Don't you feel bound in following *niyams?*

A: No, because I know that by following the *niyams* and dharma, Bhagwan Swaminarayan and Pramukh Swami Maharaj are always going to be with me. I joined the US Marines just for the challenge. At camp, I figured out that the mental challenge was just as hard as the physical challenge.

The only personal time we got was at night, 15-20 minutes. In that time, we would relax, gather and some people would write a letter. In that time, I used to read Vachanamrut, Swamini Vato, sing *cheshta* and do *mala*. In that time, I found so much peace and mental relaxation, much more than I would get from physical relaxation and I am really grateful for that.

We hiked 40 miles in just two to three days and the only meals we received were packeted. Unfortunately, even the vegetarian ones contained onion and garlic. So I didn't eat that. By Swamishri's grace, there was also, peanut butter, *khakhra*, and fruits, which I was able to eat. But the stamina and strength I got from observing *niyams* and dharma was even greater than that from food. Satsang reading provided me with so much encouragement and inspiration.

And the toughest part was hiking. It was difficult even to stand there. In that time I just remembered Nilkanth Varni and the physical hardships he went through and that gave me so much inspiration. I met all these physical and mental hardships knowing that not even a dry leaf could move without his wish.

So by observing *niyam*-dharma, I knew that I was being taken care of by him.

Faith in God
Dr Upasana Patel, Ahmedabad, India

"I was preparing for the 12th standard (Gujarat) Board exams. In the 10th standard exams I had achieved a rank in the top 10. Thus, my teachers, my parents and I myself had high expectations. But I had a fear: what if I could not answer the questions? I became very frustrated and lost my self-confidence. In that situation, I wrote a letter to Swami Bapa. In his reply, one sentence gave me renewed energy and self-confidence. He wrote, 'God will do what is best.' Swami Bapa was telling me not to worry, to keep faith in God, and that he and Bhagwan Swaminarayan were with me. After this, I continued my efforts and came first in the (Standard 12 Gujarat Board) exams."

GUEST SPEAKER

Dr Hanna Kim, Anthropologist, New York University

"It is an honour to share a few thoughts about BAPS from my perspective. Many of you know that I have been doing research on BAPS for more than fifteen years. Perhaps though, you may not know how I came to be interested in this bhakti community. I would like to share this story for it illustrates one small but significant way in which BAPS empowers not just its women followers but others who come in contact with them.

In 1990, I attended a *murti-pratishtha* in the United States. This was my first encounter with Swaminarayan *satsangis.* When I entered the hall, I was asked to sit in the *mahila* section. I met many women who were eager to share their excitement with me. When guru Pramukh Swami arrived in the hall, it was my first experience of 'Swaminarayan chaos'. It was an atmosphere of happy shouting and I could feel the powerful exchange of love between the devotees and Swamishri.

From this first impression of Swaminarayan to this moment in time, I have witnessed the many expressions of Swaminarayan devotion, strength, and creativity. I have seen their capacity to organize, manage, and motivate not just their family but many others to become better people and better *satgsangis.* The hundreds of *mandals,* mandirs, and Swaminarayan events around the world would not be possible without the contribution of women and girls. I strongly feel that it is the women and girls who are at the vanguard of BAPS.

Swaminarayan women are truly fortunate. You have a place to demonstrate your skills and talents. And, you begin from a place that supports and honours your contributions to family, community, and the wider world. You know that to cultivate your individual talents is to help not just yourself, but also many others. With the inspiration of guru Pramukh Swami, you know how to live a productive and meaningful life. This is a wonderful gift, the gift of empowerment and self-control. Thank you for sharing this gift with me." ◆

OPINION

Jeannette Groenen, Holland

A more beautiful start of these (celebration) days than with Bapa's puja is not possible. So, with a feeling of total happiness I go to the programme every day. I've seen two of the most beautiful programmes.

The dances and the colourful costumes of the perfect dancers of the first night had such a choreography and timing, from one dance to the other, and above all everything in between was so perfectly organized that I wondered how this was possible with so many dancers.

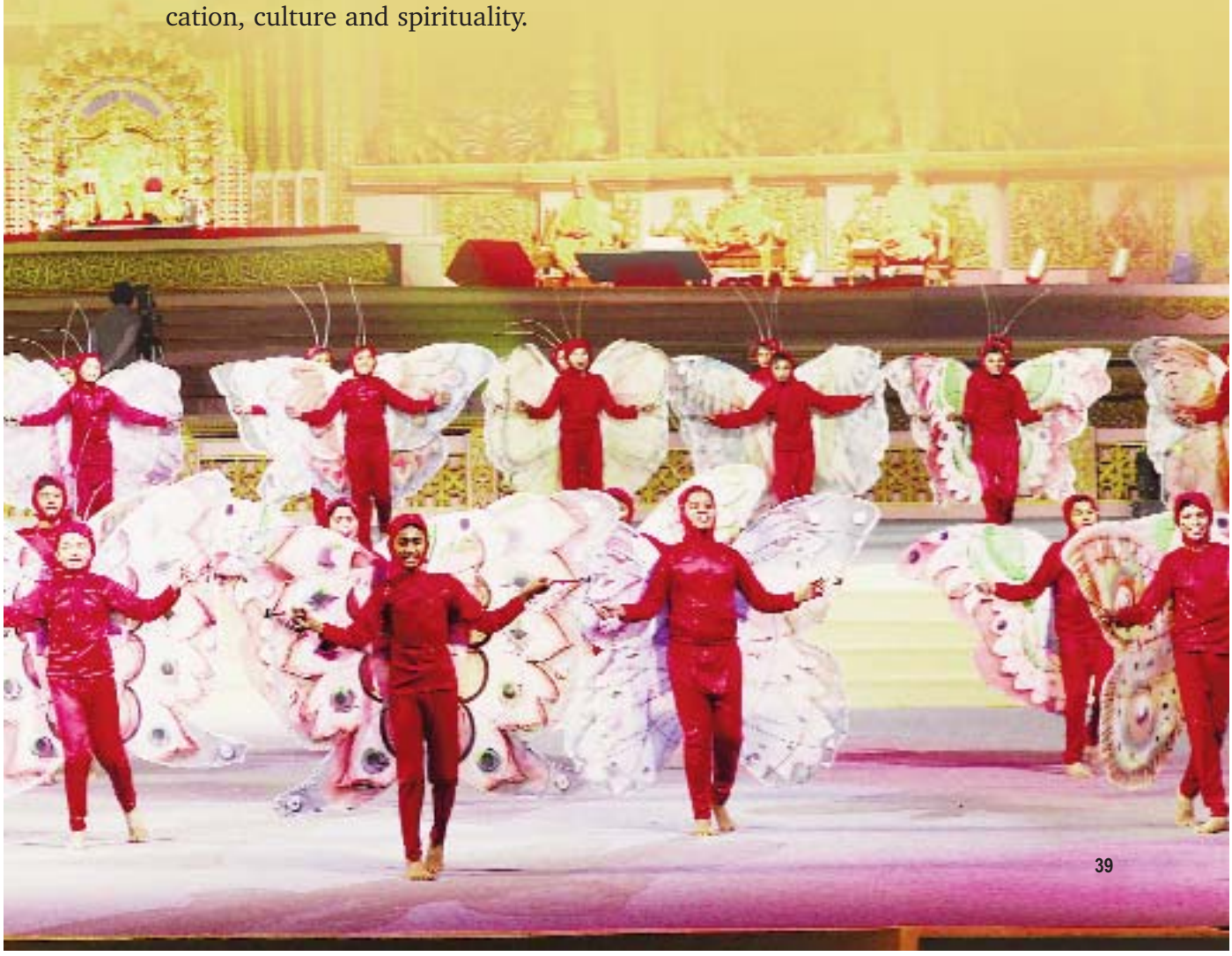
The second night for me, yesterday, with all the children was so lovely. A great enthusiasm and energy of all of them filled the air and spread over the more than one lakh people being present there. The atmosphere felt so pure and of holy clearness that I'll never forget this night too.

DAY 3 15TH DECEMBER

CHILDREN'S DAY

'TRANSFORMING TOMORROW'

On 15 December 2007, the BAPS Children's Wing celebrated Children's Day based on the theme, 'Transforming Tomorrow'. Over 120,000 people, including more than 20,000 children from the 5500 BAPS children's forums worldwide, attended this grand event. The programme, inspired by Pramukh Swami Maharaj and performed entirely by children, featured spectacular dances, dramas, videos, testimonials and other programmes emphasizing the values of character, health, education, culture and spirituality.



"I remember the dances and dramas of the Centenary Celebrations. The children were all perfect, excellent and fantastic. They knew what they were doing. They had perfect timing." - Krupal Patel, Sydney

Moral

Physical

The programme was presented in the form of a children's assembly and began with an opening prayer and traditional welcome dance.

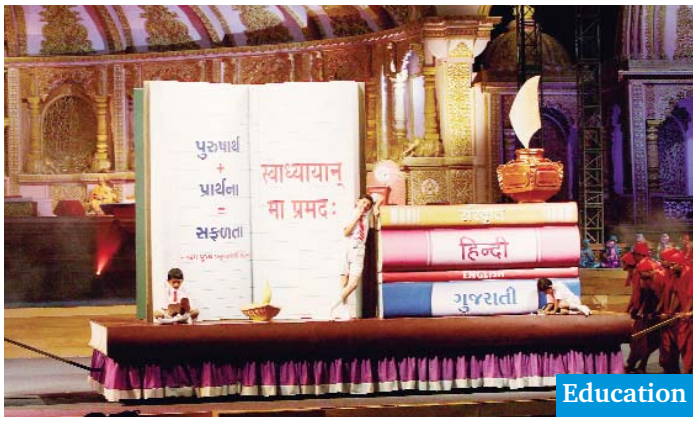
Following this, a small skit demonstrated the role of the weekly BAPS Children's Forums around the world. Founded more then 55 years ago according to Yogiji Maharaj's vision of fostering children's overall development, today, more than 150,000 children attend the 5500 BAPS children's forums worldwide and benefit from physical, educational, cultural, moral, and spiritual development.

Then, Ishwarcharan Swami, BAPS International Convener, gave a first-hand account of the establishment and growth of BAPS Children's Activities. He described how Yogiji Maharaj's visionary efforts, Pramukh Swami Maharaj's inspirational leadership and the selfless service of thousands of sadhus and volunteers have helped to nurture faith and values in innumerable children.

Thereafter, a group of children recited scriptural passages, representing the thousands of BAPS children who have memorized and internalized scriptural wisdom.

Next, a magnificent parade took spectators on a journey through BAPS Children's Activities as beautifully decorated floats rolled across the

Cultural Heritage



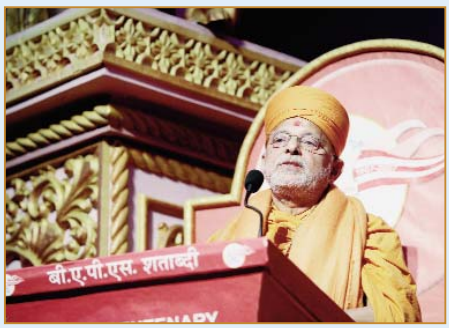
Education

Satsang

stage. Each float represented a different focus of BAPS children's activities portraying the following: the BAPS Bal Mandal teaches children moral values, grooming them into ideal citizens and devotees; encourages children to lead a healthy lifestyle; motivates children to excel in education and develop other talents; develops pride in children for Indian culture and heritage; and inspires children to progress spiritually. Over 460 children participated in this spectacular parade.

Following this, dramas and personal testimonies highlighted the following values:

Firmness in observing niyams, through the story of Shravan, a *balak* from Bahrain, who refused to eat a hamburger served to him dur-



Ishwarcharan Swami

"Yogiji Maharaj was a God-realized Sadhu and his teachings to inspire *satsang* in children and youths were truly foresighted… On Sundays or public holidays, he would say, 'Today is a holiday. All other shops are closed. But our shop for *moksha* is open'.

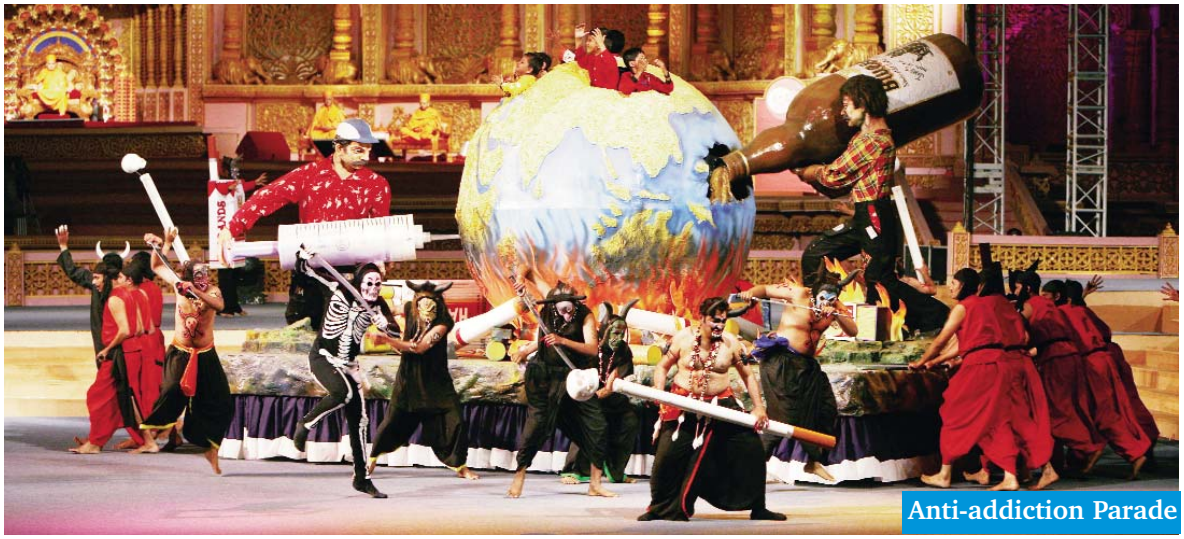
"In the villages, Yogiji Maharaj himself would gather the children for the evening *arti*. He would teach them to sing *dhun* and kirtans, offer prayers and then give them *prasad*.

"Naturally, children are fidgety and mischievous, and it is difficult to work with them. But Yogiji Maharaj undertook this work with great patience, enthusiasm and faith.

"He had a deep wish to teach the knowledge of Akshar-Purushottam to the children and to teach them values.

"By establishing the Children's Wing, Yogiji Maharaj has given us a great gift. Today, Pramukh Swami Maharaj is increasing it manifold."

"Children's Day portrayed the young children and their achievements. It's incredible that we have children of such calibre. After watching the programme I felt that my young child is on the right track." - Anup Morzaria, London



Anti-addiction Parade

ing a school trip. His mature and determined explanation for not eating meat convinced his teacher, who also became vegetarian.

Honesty, through the story of BAPS children who refused to copy in their standard 10 Board exams, despite pressure from their exam supervisor.

Faith in God, through the story of Akash from Sydney, Australia. He demonstrated his daily puja routine to his teacher and the entire class, explaining the significance of each ritual. Akash's demonstration reflected the faith in God of many BAPS children like him.

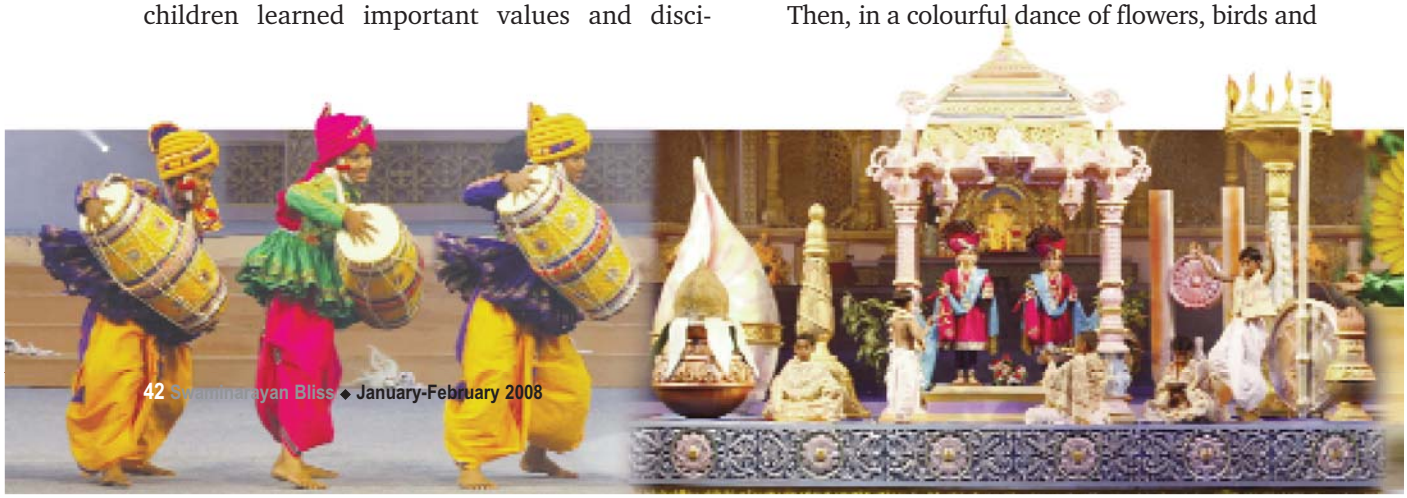
Finally, several parents spoke of how their children learned important values and disciplines through the BAPS children's forums.

Then, BAPS children who have excelled in sports, art, literature, academics and other fields were honoured on stage. (Details on page 44.)

Next a massive rally and drama was presented on the astounding de-addiction efforts by BAPS children. In the summer vacations of 2000 and 2007, over 35,000 children around India contacted over 3,000,000 people and persuaded over 1,000,000 to give up destructive addictions.

Thereafter, a video showed how BAPS is transforming tomorrow by inspiring children to elevate themselves as well as those around them.

Then, in a colourful dance of flowers, birds and



Anti-addiction Parade

butterflies, 370 BAPS children showed how they spread the message of peace around the world.

Finally, various children shared their personal incidents of how Pramukh Swami Maharaj had showered his selfless love on them. A video and prayer by children showed how Pramukh Swami Maharaj treats each child with such motherly care, that children see him not just as a towering spiritual personality, but as their best friend.

The three-hour programme was crowned with the blessings of Pramukh Swami Maharaj, "Yogiji Maharaj came up with a thought, 'We should teach them (children) values right from the start so there can be peace in society, and growth in spiritual sentiments to create an atmosphere of character'.

"In addition to children attending the *bal mandal* and learning to lead virtuous lives, Yogiji Maharaj also had a second directive for them. He wished that they study hard. He would encourage them to come first in studies.

"And so, if we look after our children right from the beginning, they will develop into virtuous people. In today's materialistic lifestyle, people forget that this is their duty."

The entire programme concluded with a spectacular fireworks display.

YOUNG ACHIEVERS

Together with social, cultural and spiritual activities, BAPS children are motivated to develop their talents in a wide variety of activities. Some of these young BAPS achievers were felicitated and blessed by Pramukh Swami Maharaj.

Nishank & Nishark Jaishval, Mumbai

Three years ago, these two 11- and 12-years-old brothers, swam 35 km in the ocean at Mumbai, from Dharmatar to the Gateway of India, setting a new national record. Their feat received widespread acclaim in magazines and newspapers.

Tilak Parekh, London

Blue Peter, BBC's famous children's programme, presented 12-year-old Tilak their Blue Peter Blue Badge and Silver Badge Awards for story-telling and poetry writing.

Vandan Popat, London

Born and raised in England, 13-year-old Vandan realized Swamishri's intense wish that all should learn Gujarati. Hence, he put in tremendous effort to learn Gujarati and pass all the Satsang examinations as well.

Yogirajsinh Rana, Dharmaj

In Malalysia, 12-year-old Yogiraj participated in the UCMAC – organized maths tournament based on the abacus method. Out of 3700 competitors from 31 countries, he stood 2nd overall and 1st in India.

YOUNG ACHIEVERS

Sharad Patel, Anand

Over the past 3 years Sharad has read much of the available Satsang literature, totalling over 20,000 pages. He also gets over 95% in each of his annual school exams.

Akshar Gajjar, Vidyanagar

An all-round artist, Akshar is talented in singing and dancing and has drawn over 300 pictures. He has won many citations, medals and awards for his skills. Museums in Japan and Korea have displayed his paintings.

Akshar Modi, Ahmedabad

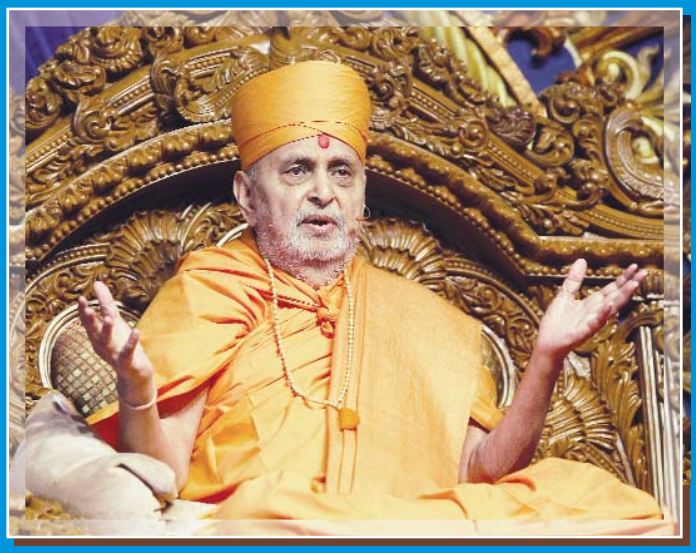
Akshar has memorized 425 *shloks* and *sakhis* and 500 Swamini Vatos. He has read over 12,000 books and can discourse on the Mahabharat for 6 hours nonstop.

Utsav Makwana, Bhavnagar

Utsav won the title of 'Mr Yogi of India' in the Open India Yogasan Championship. On stage, he bowed to Swamishri in a special yogic posture.

SWAMISHRI'S BLESSINGS

Children's Day



"Today, we saw performances by children. Seeing the atmosphere children were surrounded by, Yogiji Maharaj came up with a thought, 'We should teach them values right from the start so there can be peace in society, and growth in spiritual sentiments to create an atmosphere of character.'

Pujya Yogiji Maharaj was a visionary. He knew that one day our core values would fade due to the rise in materialism. But to preserve those values, he started the *bal mandal*. Anyone can experience peace and happiness by imbibing these Indian values in their life.

The performances we saw today are solely the result of Yogiji Maharaj's grace, his direction, his inspiration and his wishes. His wishes were great. He wished that there would be Satsang everywhere. He started *satsang mandals* in many towns and began Sunday *satsang* assemblies so that children, youth – men and women – would grow in *satsang*. Back then, Yogiji Maharaj would write postcards reminding everyone to come together on Sundays and read Swamini Vato. As a result, today there are a great number of *mandals* in both India and abroad. Thus, it is due to Yogiji Maharaj's love for us and his blessings on us that our families are at peace and that there is peace in society.

Bhakta Prahlad had been taught values when he was in his mother's womb. As a result, he was able to keep firm faith and devotion towards God despite adverse circumstances. God then came in the form of Narsinh to save him. From the beginning, Prahlad understood God's greatness. He firmly believed that God saves his devotees and that God is always there for them. Without God, we do not have the strength to speak or even walk.

God resides in all. He is everywhere. He resides in every atom of earth. Trees, leaves, mountains, caves, streams, people, animals, birds – he resides in all. Prahlad understood this, and so he saw God everywhere.

He who has worn God's 'protective armour' cannot be harmed. Nowadays, bulletproof vests provide protection, but Prahlad was protected by prayer. God's strength is greater than all. The Pandavs were victorious because they had Krishna on their side. If we have this understanding of God's greatness, then all will be well with us. If we have this understanding from a young age, problems can be peacefully put to rest.

Besides children coming to *bal mandal* and learning to lead virtuous lives, Yogiji Maharaj also had a second directive for them. He wished that they study hard. He would encourage them to rank first in school. He was never adverse to

education. He never felt children should set aside their studies and only worship God. His work was towards moulding well-rounded children.

Many say that children become too dedicated to God by coming to mandir. They say children are spoiled by coming to mandir. But there is no such thing as ruin here. We saw the result and benefit of mandirs here today. Yogiji Maharaj hasn't ruined children. He has uplifted them. He has developed a beautiful, virtuous community of people.

And so, if we look after our children right from the beginning, they will develop into virtuous people. In today's materialistic lifestyle, people forget that this is their duty.

As much as we hold on to our Indian values, we will experience peace. Where can we learn these Indian values? From mandirs, scriptures and *Satpurush*. Many say, 'Why are you going to mandir? What will you do there?' But mandir is a centre for such good activities.

The Bhagvat, Gita, Upanishads, Vachanamrut, Swamini Vato, Shikshapatri – reading such scriptures strengthens virtues in our lives. And so, we should read such scriptures. In colleges these days, there are obscene books, obscene talks and obscene images all around. As a result, good virtues leave us and are replaced by bad habits. Nowadays, spiritual education is no more, as the law forbids it. But because of this our virtues are being lost. Spiritual education is the foundation of all.

People should act according to God's wishes and the scriptures they believe in. Then only will their children develop virtues.

In foreign lands, preserving our values is difficult. Yet, Yogiji Maharaj had wished that *satsang* spread in India and abroad. Today, many devotees have come from abroad and have brought their children along with them. Mandirs were built there and children began attending, so they developed virtues. They began playing there, developing their physical fitness. Thus, even outside India, children have learned to preserve our values.

Everyone has things to do, but every evening, you should sit with your family and talk about God. Keep a mandir in your home. Pray to God everyday that you may forever remain virtuous. Read good books in the home so that your children develop virtues from the start.

They say that people gather at mandirs just to eat *prasad,* but it's not like that. Such festivals as today's are not a waste of money. These days, hundreds of thousands of rupees are spent on government conventions, but such expenses are not a waste, because they are in the best interests of the country. For the country to progress, such conventions are necessary. Similarly, mandirs are not a waste of money because they instil values in people's lives.

I pray to God that we take home good values from this programme. That such an environment is forged within our homes that unrest is resolved and that there is peace in the community and in the country.

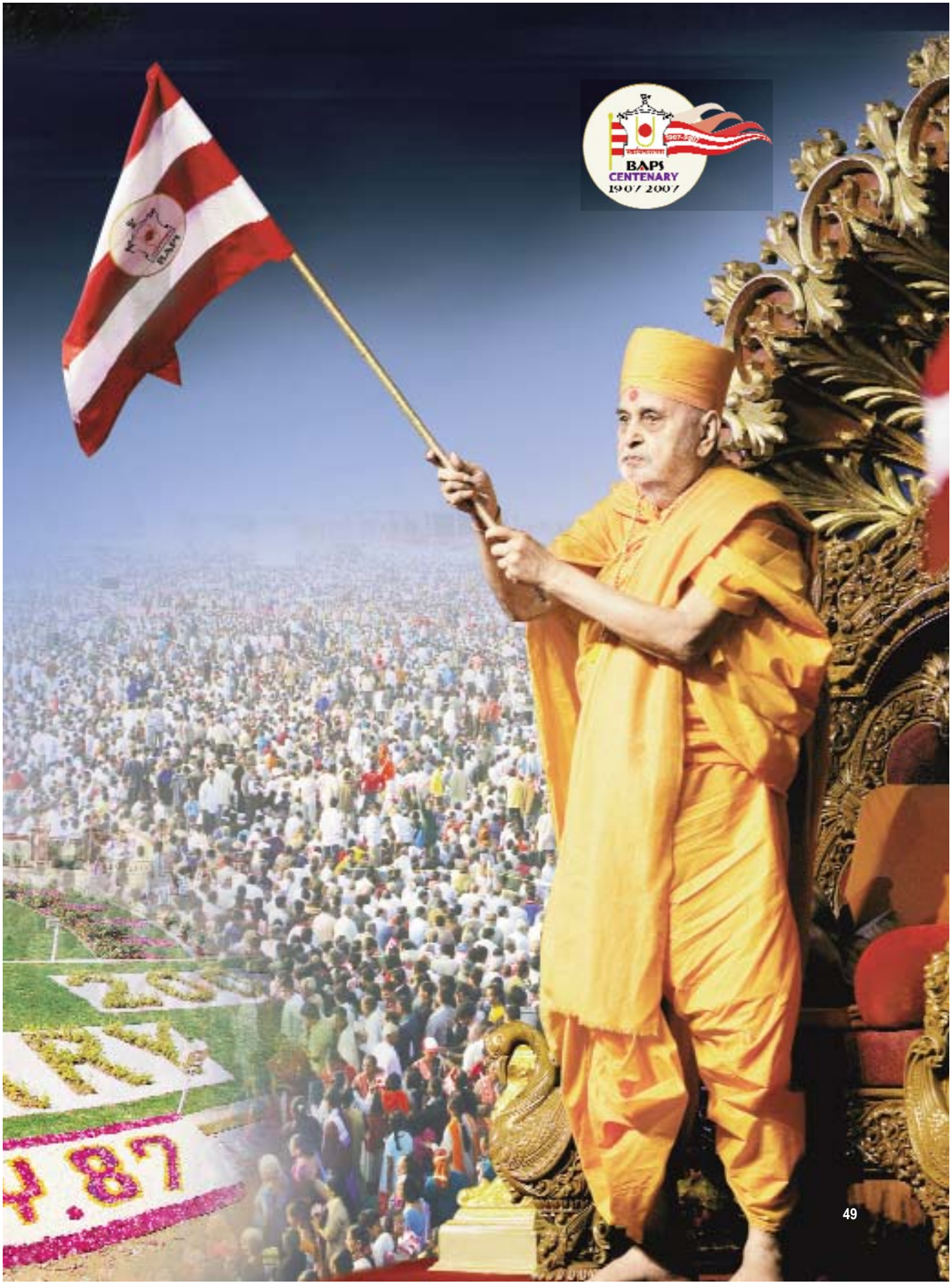
It is up to us to preserve our values. So long as we preserve our values, we will experience happiness and peace. And so I pray to God today that he grants us the strength to do so and that we all experience peace and happiness." ◆

DAY 4 — 17TH DECEMBER

GURU BHAKTI DAY

'IN THE JOY OF OTHERS'

The Bochasanwasi Shri Akshar Purushottam Swaminarayan Sanstha's (BAPS) Centenary Celebrations culminated on 17 December 2007 with the 87th birthday of His Divine Holiness Pramukh Swami Maharaj. Over 275,000 paid tribute to Pramukh Swami Maharaj's life-long inspirational services to society, selfless love and profound spirituality in an inspiring and spellbinding three-hour cultural programme performed by over a thousand BAPS children and youths. The programme focused on Pramukh Swami Maharaj's credo, 'In the Joy of others lies our own'.


BAPS
CENTENARY
1907 2007

Over 275,000 people attended on the final day

BAPS: A Tribute to its Founders

The programme commenced with 50 sadhus reciting Vedic mantras relating to the Akshar-Purushottam (i.e. Bhakta-Bhagwan) philosophy; and further included a drama set in 1907 of BAPS's founding moments under Shastriji Maharaj's leadership in Bochasan; a speech by senior sadhu Viveksagar Swami about how Yogiji Maharaj nurtured this Satsang community; and a historic video of these two gurus of Pramukh Swami Maharaj.

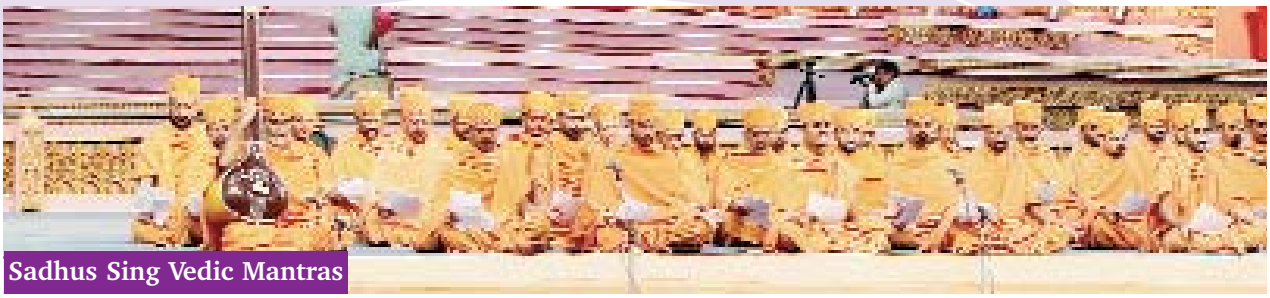
In The Joy of Others...

The next section highlighted how for the last 87 years, Pramukh Swami Maharaj has given himself to others with the sentiment: 'In the Joy of others, lies our own'. How his spirituality has touched people's hearts was presented by personal testimonies of the very people whose lives had been transformed:

A tribal villager named Reshma Parghi wrote an illegible letter to Swamishri. Reshma was moved by how Swamishri's response and care extends to the tiniest village and remotest tribal and how he treats their problems as his own.

Subhash Patel of Dar-es-Salaam, Tanzania, expressed how Swamishri's love transformed him from decadence to devotion.

Dr Dimple Bhatt of New York told of how after a crippling accident Swamishri's love lifted him out of the depths of despair and helped him become a doctor, a published author, a



Sadhus Sing Vedic Mantras

musician and candidate for the 2008 Beijing Paraolympics.

Han Kop of The Netherlands recounted how Swamishri's divine presence protected and pacified him in the face of a shark attack.

Vasant Patel of Narayannagar, Kutch, related how Swamishri's physical, financial and moral support after the Bhuj quake elevated an entire village such that it received India's 'Nirmal Village' award.

Jasbir Singh Sahni of Bahrain related how Swamishri reached out to satisfy his spiritual hunger.

Dr Faisal Sayeed Zeerah, Director of the International Hospital in Bahrain, described in a video interview how Pramukh Swami Maharaj's spirituality transcends religious boundaries.

Kenyan Land Minister Joseph Muturia described how Swamishri's inspiration transcended race and religion, as it freed him, his family and countless friends from alcohol.

A video of Pramukh Swami Maharaj concluded this section showing how by giving his heart so completely he has earned a place in the hearts of millions.

Guinness World Records Presentation

London's Michael Whitty, member of the main management committee of Guinness World Records, paid tribute to Pramukh Swami Maharaj's epoch-making work by presenting him with two world record certificates for:

1. Consecrating the most number of Hindu temples in the world – 713.

2. Creating Swaminarayan Akshardham in New Delhi as the largest comprehensive Hindu Temple in the world.

"In fact the most modest man I have seen in my life is Pramukh Swami Maharaj, radiating unconditional love, devotion and peace to everybody. He inspires men, women, kids, and youngsters to do the undoable and achieve the unachievable." - Markus Schories, Germany

Enactment of Bochasan Mandir Consecration

Living Spirituality

The final section of the programme described how the countless lives transformed and the mandirs built were all due to Pramukh Swami Maharaj's profound spirituality. A new commentary *(bhashya)* on the Vedic scriptures revealing the eternal spiritual truths on which BAPS is based was dedicated.

Then, a video of Swamishri's spirituality was followed by a series of speeches describing Pramukh Swami Maharaj's spirituality. In that vein, Anandswarup Swami described Pramukh Swami Maharaj's peaceful response after the 2002 terrorist attack on Akshardham as it showed how Swamishri has never allowed religion to become aggressive. Brahmavihari Swami related how Swamishri is an egoless personality who has never felt pride due to his achievements.

In a specially recorded video interview, former President of India, Dr APJ Abdul Kalam, told of how he had been touched by Pramukh Swami Maharaj's humility and spirituality since, in the midst of worldwide acclaim, Swamishri remains focused on serving God and people.

Senior BAPS sadhu, Doctor Swami, recounted his experiences of Pramukh Swami Maharaj's unshakeable faith in God as the all-doer whom he credits for all his achievements. Next, senior BAPS sadhu, Mahant Swami, described how the culmination of Swamishri's spirituality was that he has become a vessel for the presence of God.

Finally, after a lively dance by children and youths in which they paid homage to the guru, the three-hour programme concluded with the blessings of Pramukh Swami Maharaj, who said, "Bhagwan Swaminarayan manifested on this earth from Akshardham, with his ideal devotee Gunatitanand Swami. He wished that there be peace in the world, happiness and that the knowledge of Atma-Paramatma, Akshar-Purushottam be realized. He wished that in this way all liberate their souls. Shastriji Maharaj and Yogiji Maharaj furthered this principle.

"Bhagwan Swaminarayan has given the essence of the shastras in the Vachanamrut: that ultimately God and his holy Sadhu are the source of liberation. Only when this wisdom is realized does one experience peace."

After the blessings, 275,000 *divas* were lighted and *arti* was offered as a prayer and homage to God and guru. The programme concluded with a dance and fireworks display celebrating BAPS's glorious first century and inviting its promising second century.

GUINNESS WORLD RECORDS

TWO WORLD RECORDS PRESENTED TO PRAMUKH SWAMI MAHARAJ

Among the highlights of the Guru Bhakti Day programme on 17 December was the presentatation of two world records to Pramukh Swami Maharaj. Representing Guinness World Records was Michael Whitty, a member of GWR's main management committee who also serves as the Head of Picture Media and is an official GWR adjudicator authorized to adjudicate any world record attempt around the world.

Prior to the presentation, Michael Whitty addressed the assembly, "Before I begin to explain my role here today, I would first like to wish His Holiness a very special birthday today. We at Guinness World Records travel the world visiting amazing people and viewing remarkable things. Our aim is to each year produce a book that contains thousands of fascinating world record holding achievements that will both entertain and educate millions of people around the world. The book has existed for over 50 years and has sold over 100 million copies around the world. Guinness World Records is a brand that is recognized and loved in every part of the globe and we are very proud of its continuing appeal.

In my role as an official representative I have been involved in discussions over several months with BAPS with regards to a possibility of a major new world record. I was invited first to the impressive BAPS temple in London along with Prince Charles to view the Diwali celebrations as well as to discuss a trip to Delhi to view the Akshardham temple.

BAPS had sent all the details of the Delhi temple to our offices in London and we studied them thoroughly against existing research we had undertaken. Then I flew to Delhi and visited Akshardham yesterday and was

overwhelmed by both the size and the intricate detailing of that wonderful building. The amazing combination of marble, sandstone and wood may have been too difficult to merge in lesser hands but it's obvious to any visitor that under the guidance of His Holiness, the design and construction of Akshardham works to stunning effect. The detail in the carving and stonework both inside and out is to such a precision that it is just not seen in modern buildings anywhere and that to me is its most enduring quality.

We at Guinness love statistics and the Akshardham temple in Delhi has some very impressive ones. The temple building itself, just the building, covers 32 acres. Over 11,000 people worked on its construction and it was amazingly completed in just 5 years. Around 850 volunteers work there on a daily basis and it receives 100,000 visitors a week. However, the most important fact remains, that the building would not exist were it not for the single inspiration of one man, His Holiness. It gives me immense pleasure and is an honour to announce that today Guinness is recognizing an important new world record. The BAPS Akshardham temple in Delhi is officially the largest Hindu temple in the world. I will read to you what it says on our certificate:

BAPS Akshardham in New Delhi, India is the world's largest comprehensive Hindu temple. It measures 356 ft. long, 316 ft. wide, and 141 ft. high covering an area of 86,342 sq. ft. The grand ancient style ornately handcarved stone temple has been built without structural steel within 5 years by 11,000 artisans and volunteers. His Holiness Pramukh Swami Maharaj, revered spiritual leader of BAPS, consecrated the temple on the sixth of November 2005. Akshardham

showcases the essence of India's ageless art, borderless culture and timeless values.

This record is very important to Guinness as it affects so many people. The millions of devotees worldwide can hopefully share the pride that we have in this achievement and we will make sure and make a point of placing a large photo of the temple in our next 2009 book.

I would also like to announce on this day of celebration that we have officially updated a record that His Holiness already holds. He is recognized as having created and consecrated the most temples in the world. In 2001 the amount of temples was 405, the updated figure now stands at an amazing 713. Again I will read our certificate to you:

His Holiness, Pramukh Swami Maharaj, internationally revered spiritual leader and head of BAPS Swaminarayan Sanstha, has created and consecrated in accordance with Hindu rituals a world record 713 mandirs in 5 continents between April 1971 and November 2007. Among these the majestic ornately handcarved BAPS Akshardham in New Delhi, India stands apart as the largest Hindu temple in the world.

It takes a very special person to achieve such an incredible total and it is a unique feat in the world. I hope that we will soon be updating again to over 1000 temples. Congratulations to His Holiness, BAPS and all involved in these wonderful achievements. Finally, Your Holiness, for your remarkable achievement, you not only deserve an applause, but you deserve a standing ovation."

Swaminarayan Akshardham is a captivating educational experience of India's glorious culture and heritage, representing the essence of a living civilization that is the oldest in the world.

It was accomplished in only five years through the divine blessings and efforts of HDH Pramukh Swami Maharaj, the inspirer, and 11,000 BAPS sadhus, volunteers and artisans. More than 300 million man hours of voluntary effort and professional skill have produced an amazing cultural complex.

It enlightens visitors about the wisdom and glory of India and inspires values in life. The Hall of Values exhibition portrays the universal messages of ahimsa, endeavour, morality, prayer, family harmony, etc. through 3-D dioramas and audio-animatronics presentations of incidents from the life of Bhagwan Swaminarayan. A large format period film reveals the exciting and inspiring pilgrimage of an 11-year-old child-yogi, Neelkanth Varni (later, Bhagwan Swaminarayan), throughout India. And the 14-minute cultural boat ride takes the visitors on a journey through 10,000 years of India's illustrious heritage and contributions.

Set amid a landscape with more than 900,000 trees, plants and shrubs, Akshardham is an environmental delight. The spectacular musical fountain show, themed on the Vedic sentiments of the cycle of human life, unfolds an array of colourful and stunning water patterns.

Swaminarayan Akshardham is a memorable and transforming experience where art is ageless, values are timeless and culture is borderless.

(For details visit: *www.akshardham.com*)

SWAMINARAYAN AKSHARDHAM New Delhi

SPIRITUAL TOUCH

HOW SWAMISHRI MADE A DIFFERENCE

Reshma Parghi, Higatia, Sabarkantha

CONCERN FOR ALL

In 2000, Reshma Parghi, a tribal devotee of Higatia village wrote a letter to Pramukh Swami Maharaj. Swamishri and other sadhus tried for many minutes to read the illegible letter. But to no avail.

Eventually, Swamishri read that it was post-marked Higatia. Swamishri immediately tried to contact Shrirang Swami, who oversees *satsang* activities in that area. However, since he was travelling, it took five hours to contact him. Swamishri instructed him to find out who had written the letter and what the question was.

On investigation, the sadhus discerned that the letter has been written by Reshma Parghi. He was notorious in the area, but had recently become a *satsangi,* giving up his immoral ways. His request was for Swamishri to help fix the village handpump. When Swamishri was informed, he instantly told the sadhus to do the necessary.

Even for such devotees, Swamishri is always ready to help. As a result of Swamishri's selfless love, the village folk use water from the new handpump.

Subhash Patel
Dar-Es-Salaam, Tanzania

FROM DECADENCE TO DEVOTION

"Everyday for 24 years not a day has passed without my indulging in addictions.

But in 1995, a friend took me to meet Swamishri who asked me my name, native village and father's name. Even before I had finished, he told me that my father and his elder brother had come to Morogoro (in Tanzania) in 1960 for Yogiji Maharaj's darshan. I was young then. While thoughts raced through my mind, Swamishri said, 'Come to puja tomorrow.' At home, I couldn't sleep that night. I felt that he was a divine person. Otherwise how could he remember something from 35 years ago! But Swamishri remembered instantly.

In puja, our four eyes met. From that moment I gave up all addictions. Today I engage regularly in *satsang*. These addictions were no small things. And that I, a lion of Africa am standing here before you like a meek goat is in itself a miracle. It is purely due to the blessings of Swamishri."

Dr Hari Bhatt, New York, USA

Swamishri Provided Peace and Healing

"We are all here – those of us on the stage, in front of the stage and behind the stage, because somehow our lives have been touched by Pujya Pramukh Swami Maharaj. Let me tell you my story. Growing up I was an outgoing athletic kid. It all came to a crashing halt in my first year of college. I had a car accident that left me unable to walk.

My life and the lives of the people closest to me were shaken. From being an academic and athletic wonder boy, I now had to struggle to even move a toe or bear the pain of the simplest movement. I felt my present, and worse, my future had been cruelly snatched away – left in the ruin of a smashed up Mercedes. I was confused and depressed. Hope was slipping, but even more painfully, I could sense the anguish of my friends and family.

But one of the great saviours at that time in my life, for me and for my parents was the magnificent fortune we had in the form of Bapa. We had in our lives a guru who is an undisguised form of all that is good in humanity – and when I opened my heart, to pour out my grief, my dreams, my insecurities, he listened.

At that moment in my life, he was there for me, with his hand on the shoulder of a boy in a wheelchair becoming a man. I won't get into the specifics of that conversation with a sadhu who has millennial wisdom.

It was a private moment that I will take with me into the next life. A private moment that has had its lasting effects in the way I see the world and my role in it. But I will tell you that it was a great man listening to a confused child. And more than just the guidance of his words, there was the peace and healing from having him listen to me. And whether it is between friends, family, enemies or sadhus and *haribhaktas* – listening is the greatest form of love.

I want to thank you Bapa for listening to me, and helping me and giving faith-affirming strength to my parents. Your love has been an unending source of peace lighting my spirit – showing me that true miracles are within us. This is a credo that has enabled me to not only accomplish what I have, but more importantly, to continue to strive for greater things.

Thank you Bapa for your blessings."

SPIRITUAL TOUCH

Han Kop, Holland

Swamishri's Protective Power

"The single most dramatic experience of my life happened in May of 1972. Actually, it was a series of events from my first encounter with the Swaminarayan Sanstha in Mombasa to a short stay in the Mumbai mandir and my first contact with Pramukh Swami Maharaj in Gondal.

The culmination of the effects of these visits took place in a remote place in Karachi off the coast of Pakistan. I was on a beach enjoying the cool breeze and waters of the Arabian Sea. Local children had brought car tubes to float on. But they lost them to the wind. Feeling sorry I swam into the sea to retrieve their tube. I sat on one for a few minutes, out of breath.

The very moment I decided to slowly paddle back to the beach, which was a good 1000 feet away, I saw a shark right in front of me. At first I froze from fear, then tried to lift my body out of the water. Failing to do so I started panicking and had visions of being eaten alive. The shark was clearly visible and my fearful mind had made it into a huge monster.

Suddenly I remembered Swamiji and his last words before I had taken his leave: *'Amane bhulta nahi'* – ***Do not forget us,*** he had said.

This was the moment of truth for me. I experienced the strongest recollection of his presence. He occupied my mind. The image of Swami Bapa, his face and eyes exactly as I had known them stayed with me. In fact I saw nothing else. With my mind floating and my panic gone I was able to make the right decision. I jumped into the waves and swam back to the shore in a record breaking time.

There and then I thanked Swamiji for having become my lifeline. I believed it to be a miracle of sorts, but perfectly acceptable and explicable. The experience itself was a down-to-earth one. I was out there, scared to death, alone, desperate with a strong sense of survival. I had nothing to grasp on, nowhere to run away to and the engulfing presence of the shark and the ocean had minimized my chances of survival.

Swamiji's all-encompassing protective power had felt supernatural. And a change had taken place on the spiritual level, something which for a Westerner is not easy to understand or accept. I had greatly felt Swamiji's closeness, experienced the conviction of his saving love.

I have chosen – if choice is the right word – for Pramukh Swami Maharaj to be my guide, to lead me on to that path of conscience necessary for spiritual progress.

He is the only one person capable of transforming my life. Through this incident, more than 35 years ago, he has reached out, given his hand to me and I have grasped it. His touch has changed me. His words have carved my thoughts and his love has touched my soul."

Vasantbhai Patel, Narayannagar, Kutch

ALL-ROUND SUPPORT

"In the 2001 earthquake, our Jiyapar village was totally destroyed. At that time, both rich and poor were on the streets, homeless. It was such a devastating situation that we did not have a clue about what to do.

Under the circumstances, Pramukh Swami Maharaj and the BAPS sadhus came to our help. There were no Swaminarayan devotees in our village; nobody ever knew about BAPS. But the sadhus comforted us. With great care they provided for our needs.

When the time came to build a new village, doubts remained about what it would be like and where we would get our homes. But the Sanstha did a splendid job and allocated homes so that we could be near our relatives. In just one year, they built 285 homes. The village was renamed Narayannagar.

The Sanstha has not compromised on the cost, but has catered for all our needs: electricity, water, drainage, roads, street lights, etc. Also, 3500 trees were planted.

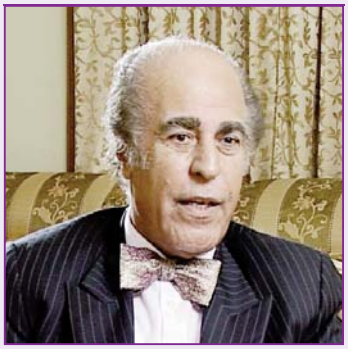
Due to the infrastructure and cleanliness of the village, President Dr Abdul Kalam honoured Narayannagar with the 'Nirmal Village' award. In addition to this, the Sanstha has given us *samskars*. I used to smoke 15 cigarettes and 50 *bidis* daily. Now I am free of addictions.

Pramukh Swami Maharaj and the sadhus are our pillars of support and compassion, so we present all our questions to them.

We have forgotten the anguish of the earthquake and Pramukh Swami Maharaj has laid the path of happiness for our future generations."

Award-winning Narayannagar Village

SPIRITUAL TOUCH



Dr Faisal Sayeed Zeerah, Bahrain

A Divine Experience

"I am Faisal Sayeed Zeerah. I am a surgeon. I run the International Hospital of Bahrain, a major medical centre, the oldest private hospital in the country.

From the first day I met Pramukh Swami, from the time that I went to pick him up at the airport, from the time that I saw him come out I could feel if there is anything closer to seeing angels flying in the air and a kind of a spirit of nirvana then it has to be him.

When I saw Pramukh Swami there was a world different from what I was used to. I cannot tell you anything but I could see and feel something I have not felt before. I was in the presence of something substantial – of a spiritual power. Something other than the five senses come into play and you cannot get that from just anybody, but except from somebody who has a touch of God inside him and who has got something powerful, something tremendous being inside him.

And my faith in him is unfathomable. When my mother, when my late mother was sick and he walked into the hospital and I asked him to say prayers for her. By the time he finished it changed the course of life and my mother was feeling well.

Whatever I tell you about the position that Pramukh Swami has in our hearts would be an understatement. Pramukh Swami occupies an enormous place in our thinking, in our spirituality and in the way we live. And I have him as my guru and as my beacon in most of the things that I do."

Q: You mentioned Pramukh Swami is like your guru…

A: He is not like my guru, he is my guru. He is my guru, and will always be my guru. And I follow his teachings, and he is somebody! He is the guru.

Honourable Joseph Muturia
Nairobi, Kenya

A Life-transforming Festival

"When I came to the 1985 festival, I brought with me three bottles of Jhonnie Walker Whiskey – one bottle for each day.

At the festival, in His Holiness Pramukh Swami's presence, I was to address a meeting meant to convert drunkards, smokers, and addicts into good members of society. I was drinking, but when I saw Swamiji and the hundreds of youths renouncing the world to be sadhus, I thought, 'If they can give up their whole life, I can give up my bad habit.'

So, I promised Swamiji and the entire assembly that I will henceforth stop drinking alcohol. And as I flew off to Kenya, I left my friend alcohol forever.

Since my vow, 22 years ago, not only have I never taken alcohol, I have also helped so many people quit smoking and drinking in Kenya.

On this occasion of Swamiji's 87th birthday, I would like to thank His Holiness Pramukh Swamiji for making my life free of alcohol.

But more thankful than me, is my wife. She has sent a letter for me to share with you:

Dear Pramukh Swami Maharaj,

My name is Mrs. Jemimah Mogare Muturia. I run a college in Nairobi, and I am doing a PhD in Management.

My husband was a drunkard for many years. During the day he worked as an MP and assistant minister, and till late night he used to drink alcohol.

Throughout the night I never used to sleep well because I was worried about his welfare.

Despite a good government salary, he used to spend so much on alcohol, we didn't have money to buy a house or even pay our children's school fees on time.

Once, my husband went to India to attend a celebration hosted by you His Holiness Pramukh Swami. He came back full of joy and happiness like he had never been before. I asked him why he was so happy. He said, 'I have left my "friend" alcohol forever.' We rejoiced together and since that time, he has never gone back to drinking.

Because of my husband's alcohol-free life, we have been able to afford our own home and further higher education. We have enjoyed a stronger marriage and a more comfortable, healthier, spiritual family life.

I thank His Holiness Pramukh Swami because through him God transformed my husband's life and my entire family.

I also thank His Holiness Pramukh Swami on behalf of many of my husband's colleagues who have quit drinking alcohol because of Swamiji's influence on my husband."

SPIRITUAL TOUCH

Jasbir Singh Sahni, Bahrain

Dr APJ Abdul Kalam, New Delhi

A Living Guru

An IIT engineer, Jasbir Singh felt a divine experience when Swamishri visited his home.

"I belong to a devout Sikh family. But in college I fell into bad company and began indulging in meat-eating, drinking alcohol, smoking and other addictions.

After marriage, I studied the Guru Granth Saheb with my wife. We hoped that we would find a living guru with the virtues described in the Guru Granth Saheb. Ten years ago, God granted our wish – in the form of Pramukh Swami Maharaj. Since then, I have been attending the Sunday assembly, performing morning puja and applying *tilak-chandlo*. *Arti* and *thal* are offered daily at home. We even sing the *cheshta* at night.

In 1997, Swamishri visited Bahrain and I had his darshan for the first time. He sanctified my home. He sat where we daily sang *cheshta* and told me to sing *cheshta*. Then he himself began to sing… *Pratham Shri Hari ne re…*

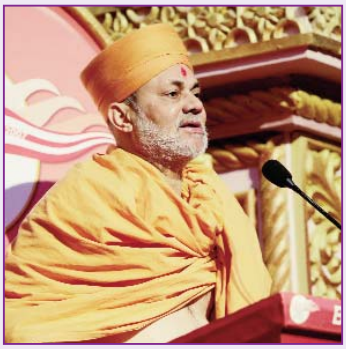
Swamishri took so much trouble for a small devotee like me."

Maha Pramukh Swamiji

"I am indeed delighted to know Maha Pramukh Swamiji's birthday is coming. The birthday is a very important event particularly for Maha Pramukh Swamiji whom I have a deep respect. I have met him a number of times and we have had a number of discussions. The most important I felt is his creation of Akshardham at Delhi. Akshardham is a unique creation. It is a creation of art, creation of faith, creation of civilization, celebration of a culture, celebration of human life. So we are all proud of that creation. The creator is indeed Maha Pramukh Swamiji. And of course I asked him, I told him this, he said, "No, I am not the creator." He put his head up and the God it is Shri Swaminarayanji, he said. In Maha Pramukh Swamiji, I felt during the interaction, during the talking to him, at various times, his humility and then his concern for the happiness of the people, his concern for the suffering of the people. The spiritual quality, one of the great quality I have seen in Maha Pramukh Swamiji is that he is always trying to see what I can give to the people. And that is the great spirituality."

SPEECHES BY SENIOR SADHUS

Viveksagar Swami



Yogiji Maharaj's Major Contributions

In his speech Vivesagar Swami described the major work of Brahmaswarup Yogiji Maharaj while he was guru of BAPS between 1951 and 1971:

- Over 4000 city, town and village visits.
- Sanctified over 100,000 homes.
- Consecrated 3 *shikharbaddh* and 54 *hari* mandirs, including mandirs in East Africa and England.
- Began the Sunday assembly on a regular basis.
- Introduced the *Swaminarayan Satsang Patrika*, now incorporated in the *Swaminarayan Prakash*.
- Established the Children's and Youth Wings.
- Initiated scores of educated youths into the sadhu-fold.
- Built student hostels in Vidyanagar and Gondal.
- Developed a dedicated volunteer force.
- Celebrated festivals on a grand scale, such as Shastriji Maharaj's Centenary.

Yogiji Maharaj's innate saintliness was felt and praised by distinguished spiritual leaders, including Pujya Chinmayanand Swami, Pujya Muktanand Baba, Pujya Vasudevanand Swami, Pujya Pandurang Shastri and others.

Yogiji Maharaj's greatest gift to us was Pramukh Swami Maharaj, because to prepare a disciple like himself is the hardest thing.

Doctor Swami

True Saintliness means Humility

"We have heard about the growth of the Sanstha. At the root of it lies *sadhuta* – saintliness: the saintliness of Shastriji Maharaj, Yogiji Maharaj and Pramukh Swami Maharaj. Swami Vivekanand has said, 'The greatest strength for any society is its faith in God'. This is also true for any individual. So the greatest source of strength is God.

What is the strength of God like? If one places all the facilities given by science on one side, it is not even equivalent to a drop of water. While the strength of God is like the vast ocean.

"The programme which touched my heart's feelings was the last day (17th). It changed my feelings tremendously towards Satsang and surroundings. I felt that I value this Satsang much more and will continue to increase my bhakti and bhavna." - Anmol Desai, NZ

When can the strength of God be felt? When one attains saintliness the strength of God is felt.

The highest status is that of God. But God is manifest in the heart of a true Sadhu and God works through such a Sadhu. What are the qualities of such a Sadhu? There are many qualities, but the greatest is that of humility, egolessness. Such humility was also the key virtue in Bhagwan Swaminarayan, Gunatitanand Swami, Bhagatji Maharaj, Shastriji Maharaj and Yogiji Maharaj. This is also seen in the life of Pramukh Swami Maharaj.

Second, when God manifests in the heart, no situation shakes the Sadhu.

Third, Pramukh Swami Maharaj does not forget even the smallest of people. He sees God in them, too.

When such saintliness is developed by all, then this Centenary and Birthday can be said to have been celebrated in there truest sense."

Mahant Swami

Beholding God

"The virtues of Swami Bapa that we have heard upto now are many. But the root cause is that Swami Bapa continuously beholds God within himself.

Of all the endeavours, to bear God within oneself is the highest.

Just as air is called the lifeforce and is the support of all, similarly beholding God is the root cause of everything.

To behold God continuously is not an ordinary thing.

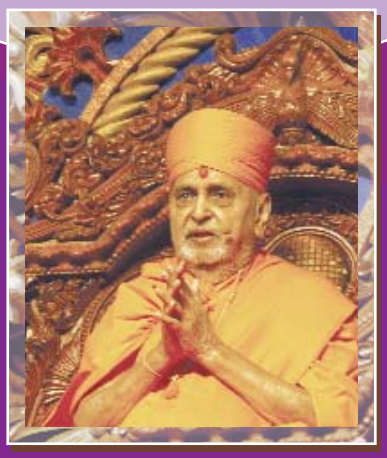
What is meant by beholding God? To behold means to represent him. That work which Bhagwan Swaminarayan came to earth and did is the work Swami Bapa is doing. All the gurus have done this also. This is beholding God.

Yogi Bapa was asked, 'When did you realize God?' Yogi Bapa replied, 'I continuously have the darshan of God.'

One who constantly beholds God is liberated. Such a person becomes a medium through whom God works. Maharaj himself has said, 'God sees through the eyes of such a Sadhu. God walks in his feet. In all his works God is the doer.' "

Guru Bhakti Day

SWAMISHRI'S BLESSINGS



"The work (spiritual achievements) we have heard about just now is due to the grace of Bhagwan Swaminarayan, the blessings of gurus Shastriji Maharaj and Yogiji Maharaj, and the support of all the sadhus, who have taken initiation by Yogiji Maharaj's wish. Also, the mandirs that have been built, the Satsang activities, the *vicharan* in India and abroad are all due to the support of all the devotees.

This work is not ordinary. Bhagwan Swaminarayan manifested on this earth from Akshardham, with his ideal devotee Gunatitanand Swami. He wished that there be peace in the world, happiness and that the knowledge of Atma-Paramatma, Akshar-Purushottam be realized. He wished that in this way all liberate their soul. Shastriji Maharaj and Yogiji Maharaj furthered this principle.

But all this is not possible by our efforts only. It happens by the power and wish of God.

The support and strength of God are important and should always be maintained. Today, amid all this materialism, one forgets this and from the time one awakes, only worldly thoughts arise.

God has given this body so that from the time one wakes up one should wish that God liberates all and that all people throughout the world attain happiness. People get physical peace and comforts. But until one experiences peace in one's *atma*, it is incomplete.

For this our ancient avatars, *acharyas* and rishis have given us the Bhagvad Gita, Upanishads, Brahmasutras. The principle of Akshar and Purushottam is in the Gita, Upanishads and Brahmasutras. And this is the principle Bhagwan Swaminarayan revealed and established. If one realizes this it will bring happiness.

The shastras give us two types of knowledge – *para vidya* and *apara vidya*. *Apara vidya* is worldly knowledge. *Para vidya* is knowledge of Brahman and Parabrahman, Atma and Paramatma, Akshar and Purushottam. Our birth is for attaining this wisdom. Gunatitanand Swami has said, 'What is this birth for? To become *akshar-rup* and worship Purushottam.' It is the essence of all shastras. Only if this is attained does one become enlightened.

Yogiji Maharaj used to say, 'May God do good for all.' This is the thought we should have on waking in the morning. It will bring true enlightenment in our lives. And with it will come peace.

Bhagwan Swamianrayan has given the essence of the shastras in the Vachanamrut: that ultimately God and his holy Sadhu are the source of liberation. Only when this wisdom is realized does one experience peace.

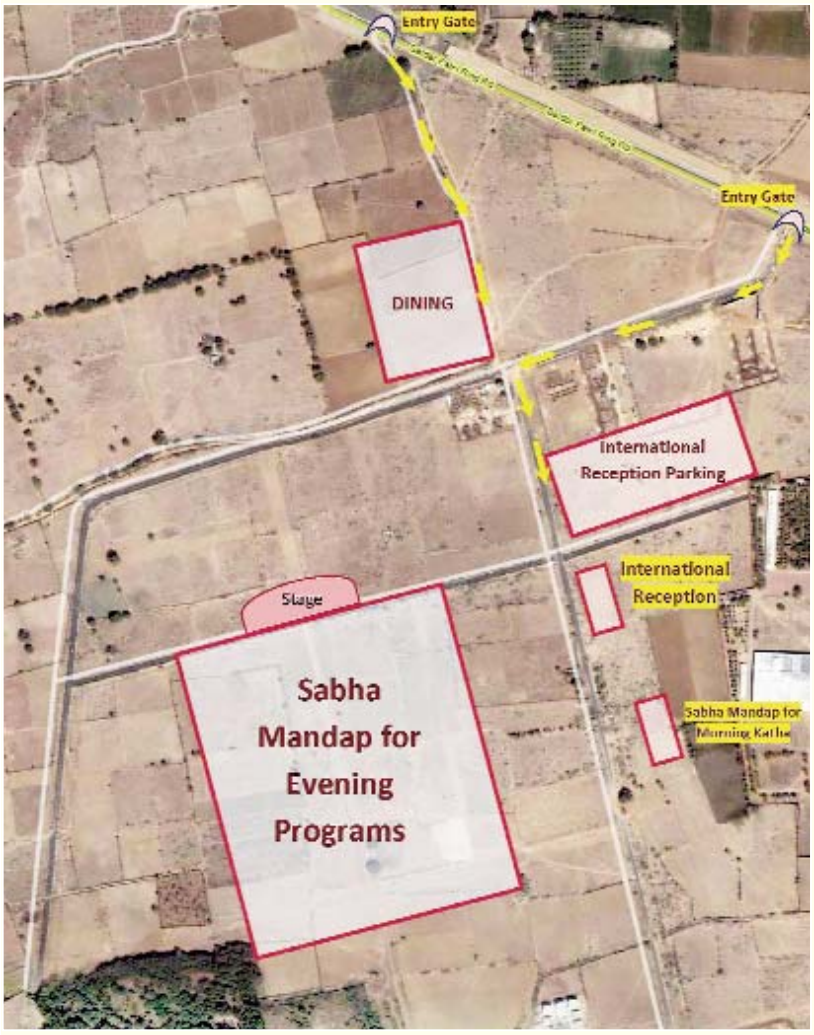
May all be blessed, may all become happy and may all be redeemed." ◆

SWAMINARAYAN NAGAR

FESTIVAL SITE & VOLUNTEER SERVICES

FESTIVAL SITE

Initially, the plan was to use a stadium for the Centenary Celebrations. However, since the number of devotees expected to attend was over 250,000 for the last day, this idea was discarded and the search for a suitable site started.



In July 2007, a large area in the Chandkheda suburb of Ahmedabad was considered.

This land was owned by scores of farmers and building contractors. Many farmers had planted crops, and builders had planned and constructed residential buildings. However, with the valuable help of Shri Valmikbhai Patel, Shri Bhikhabhai Patel, Shri Bhanubhai Patel and Shri Gunvantbhai Patel, 127 farmers and builders generously agreed to allow their land to be used for the celebrations. Hence, farmers harvested or removed their crops and builders stalled their projects to allow preparations for the festival to begin.

VOLUNTEER SERVICES

Volunteers from throughout Gujarat, Mumbai and other BAPS centres in India and abroad, served for periods varying from 20 days to 4 months. In all, 10,500 male volunteers and 2800 female volunteers gave their time and skills to ensure the smooth conduction of the celebrations.

VOLUNTEER DEPARTMENTS

The smooth planning, preparation and execution of the centenary celebrations was coordinated by the following departments:

- Kitchen
- Assembly Arrangements
- Transport and Parking
- Water
- Accommodation and Cloakroom
- Housekeeping
- Security
- Electric
- General Stores
- Construction
- Volunteers
- Landscape
- Bookstall
- Decoration and Signboards
- Press and Publicity
- Public Relations
- Akshardham Darshan
- Mandir Arrangements
- Audio System
- Medical
- Communications
- Audio-Visual
- Enquiries
- Legal
- Foodstalls
- Women's Wing
- Wind Up
- Emergency
- Video Screens
- International Reception
- Stage Programmes
- Stage Arrangements
- Records
- Swamishri's residence
- Cultural Programmes
- Mantra Books
- Accounts

Details of the work of some of the departments are presented below.

CONSTRUCTION DEPARTMENT

Land development on the festival site began on 22 August 2007.

First, the land was flattened and debris removed.

The Construction Department managed the building of the entire infrastructure required, with the help of Laluji & Sons and Kishore Parmar Mandap Services.

An 8.82 km long wall of aluminium sheets was erected around the perimeter of the festival site.

A total of 1,157,233 sq. ft. of temporary canopied areas were built. To prevent dust from the ground rising in the air, 2,710,271 sq. ft. of green netting was fixed to the ground.

The land area used for the festival was 321 acres. Of this 117 acres were used for parking, and 94 acres were used for roads and walkways.

The Ahmedabad Urban Development Authority (AUDA) re-surfaced 13,000 running feet of road to enable smooth flow of traffic.

Also, residents of the Chandkheda suburb wholeheartedly provided support in all respects.

In addition, generous cooperation was provided by the Ahmedabad Municipal Corporation, Gandhinagar Municipal Corporation, Chandkheda Nagarpalika and the Collector's Office in Gandhinagar to ensure the timely completion of preparations and trouble-free celebrations.

In case of emergency, fire-fighting and ambulance facilities were kept ready on site.

Over 13,000 volunteers in 39 departments performed the smooth planning, preparation and execution of the Centenary Celebrations. They offered their services from 20 days to four months.

Volunteers cut designs on polystyrene sheets

Decorating the main stage

DECORATION DEPARTMENT

From left to right, stretching for almost the length of a football pitch, the main stage was the hub of the festival site. The design for the majestic main festival stage was conceived many months in advance by Narayanmuni Swami and Brahmacharan Swami. Due to the grandeur and enormity of the stage designs, preparations began in Sarangpur from 26 September 2007. A team of 18 sadhus and 50 volunteers, under the supervision of Brahmacharan Swami, began preparing the metal framework, fibreglass pillars and designs on polystyrene sheets. Also, 40 volunteers in Bhavnagar, Surat and Vidyanagar simultaneously helped to cut the designs.

First the designs were drawn on butter paper, cut from a 4-ft roll, from which stencils were made. Using these stencils, the designs were imprinted onto polystyrene sheets 6 ft x 3 ft and 3 ft x 1.5 ft in size.

Over 40 different intricate designs which included mandirs, lamps, flowers, flags, Akshar Deris and other Hindu symbols were used to decorate the stage, which itself resembled a giant Akshar Deri.

In Sarangpur, the dome framework, comprising two 28-ft sections and a 34-ft section, were prepared. All these structures and designs were then transported using 18 trailers and trucks to the festival site in Chandkheda, Ahmedabad.

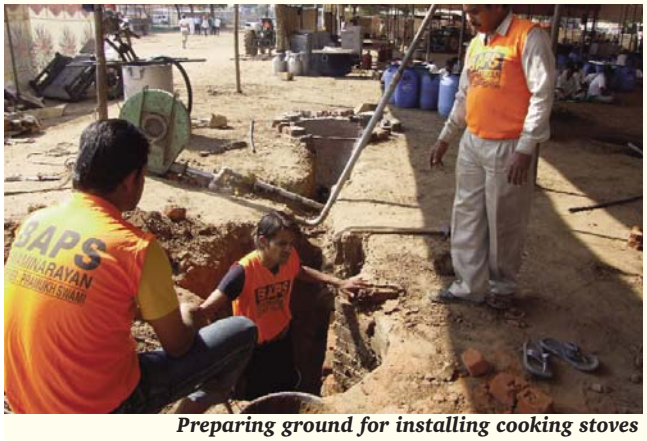
On 26 October, the stage construction began at the festival site. Here, the cut designs were individually shaped by hand to give them a 3-D look.

The stage structure was built on readily assembled H-frames. The stage area comprised platforms of varying heights, and dimensions, in accordance with requirements for the stage programmes.

In total, the artistically stunning main and performing stages measured 355 feet wide, 51 feet high and 156 feet deep.

The main stage for Swamishri and senior sadhus under the dome was 90 feet wide and 40 feet deep, with the platform for Swamishri's seat at a height of 16 feet and the seats for the senior sadhus at a height of 14 feet.

In front of this were the two performing stages measuring 80 x 50 ft and 80 x 40 ft. The six side



Preparing ground for installing cooking stoves

Landscape department volunteers at work

stages measured 40 x 32 ft. Gradually inclining ramps were built on both sides to enable the smooth entry and exit of performers during their presentation.

The magnitude of the stage design presented a challenge for the sadhus and volunteers. The weather also made matters more difficult. The chilly temperatures of the morning and night, together with the burning sun of the afternoon were problematic. However, these conditions were braved as the stage structure was erected, fitted with the coloured cloth and decorated with thermocol and bamboo designs.

The decoration department was principally responsible for building the main stage, Yagnapurush Dwar – the decorative entrance gate to the festival site and Shatabdi Dwar – the grand entrance gate to the assembly ground. It also made signboards for the 321 acres of the celebration ground.

Over 300 volunteers served in the decoration department.

DANCE PREPARATIONS

The programmes for each of the four days featured parades, thematic dances and skits.

For the Youth Day, three main cultural items were prepared:

1. Parade: 130 *kishores* and *yuvaks* representing the 26 countries in which regular BAPS *satsang* activities take place.

2. Opening Dance: 375 youths portraying the six principles of BAPS – *siddhant, sadhuta, seva, samarpan, samp* and *satpurush*.

3. Unity Dance: 105 youths depicting the power of unity in all BAPS activities, be they spiritual, social, cultural, educational, medical, environmental or disaster relief.

The Women's Day featured two presentations:

1. Bhakti Yatra.

2. Kankavati Dance.

The Children's Day featured two dances:

1. Welcome Dance: 200 *balaks*.

2. The Grand Dance: 370 *balaks.*

The planning and preparation that went into the successful performance of all these presentations was also of giant proportions.

First, the lyrics of all the dances were written by Aksharjivan Swami and Harichintan Swami.

"The programme was wonderful and not only that but the volunteers behind it did it all for the love of Pramukh Swami Maharaj. This was unique too." - Prof. Navinbhai Swaminarayan, London

Water booths provide drinking water for all

Chairs for the assembly seating

They were then recorded with appropriate music under the supervision of Parag Shastri.

Meanwhile, auditions were held to select the large number of dancers required.

In total, 500 *kishores* and *yuvaks*, 1500 *balaks*, and 1100 *balikas, kishoris* and *yuvatis* participated in the various dances.

The practice sessions were held in two phases: from 3 to 25 November and from 1 December onwards.

In the first practice phase, the *balaks, kishores* and *yuvaks*, practised under the supervision of Shri Jayendra Kalyani at Ahmedabad Mandir and the BAPS School at Raisan. The *balikas*, *kishoris* and *yuvatis* practiced at the Satellite *sanskardham* in Ahmedabad, also under the guidance of Jayendra Kalyani.

The focused training involved nine hours of practice daily. In addition to this, all the participants regularly attended the daily discourses and spiritual discussions, in which the youths gained a deeper understanding of the principles and values taught by Bhagwan Swaminarayan and the Guru Parampara.

The second practice phase was held at the festival site. Each group was allotted specific times for practice on the main stage, with rehearsels beginning at 7.00 am and lasting till 2.00 am. The groups also practiced off-stage in special canopied halls and open ground.

For all the dance participants, their accommodation, catering and other requirements were taken care of by a team of 500 dedicated youth volunteers.

Despite the demanding schedules, children and youngsters practised enthusiastically. For many it was the first time they were spending such a long time away from home. The daily routine of children also allowed time for school studies, in which experienced teachers taught them.

Many of the youths who participated had taken extended leave from their jobs, and some had even left their jobs to offer their services on this unique occasion.

The entire experience provided valuable lessons in living together with others and being self-sufficient. Also, they received motivation to study sincerely and live by the principles and values of BAPS.

Cutting vegetables

Tuition classes for children in the dance programmes

The property required for the dances included: pillars, elephants, baby elephants, bullocks, pigeons, swans, horses, drums, conches, shahnais, bugles, Akshar Deris and other items.

All these were made by 75 Bengali craftsmen over a period of three months, using bamboos, papier-mâché, polystyrene and other decorative materials.

Among the youths who were selected, the majority of them had little experience in performing dances on this scale. But with their efforts, the reassuring guidance of the training staff and the blessings of Swamishri the youths performed the dance routines extremely well.

INTERNATIONAL RECEPTION

The international reception department was specially set up to cater to the needs of devotees coming from abroad. The first task of the department was the online registration of overseas devotees for accommodation. Thereafter hotels around Ahmedabad were contacted, special deals were negotiated and the bookings were made available online. Those who needed accommodation and transport booked their families into a hotel of their choice and price range. Also, details of the festival, schedules, driving directions, and all other essential information was posted on the BAPS website to help devotees plan for the festival.

A special welcome kit was issued to each registered person after arriving on site. This included their assembly entry passes, parking pass, informative booklet with festival schedules, tour information, maps, and other useful data. Other services provided in the reception included car hire, flight bookings, tour planning, ATM and foreign exchange, medical treatment, mobile phone services and a large food court for light snacks.

The International Department was also given the responsibility of receiving devotees arriving at the airport and railway station. Volunteers were in attendance day and night, assisting visitors with transportation needs to their accommodation and distribution of information regarding the festival.

Over 8700 people from America, Canada, the UK, Europe, Australia, New Zealand, Africa

"I am a 67-year-old man. I am touched by the genuine care and affection shown by the volunteers of the BAPS. Nowhere before have I experienced this in my life." - Mani Chettiar, Villianur, Pondicherry

Entry gate to the Swaminarayan Nagar

Archways generate public awareness of the celebrations

Hoardings announcing the Centenary Celebrations

and the Middle East attended the centenary celebrations.

TRANSPORT DEPARTMENT

The transport department was responsible for taking care of the transportation needs of the various departments in the build up to and during the celebration days.

For this, devotees in different cities around Ahmedabad, Kheda and Mahesana were requested to give their vehicles for use.

Many devotees generously gave their vehicles, which included cars, motorbikes, scooters, rickshaws, tractors, trucks, mini trucks, mini buses and JCBs to use for up to four months.

The transport department was also responsible for the smooth flow of traffic in and out of the festival site and parking zones.

During the four-day celebrations, parking for over 21,000 vehicles was managed.

In all, 12 sadhus and over 1250 volunteers served in the transport department.

SECURITY DEPARTMENT

Security volunteers patrolled the celebration grounds day and night from the time construction first began in August.

During the celebrations 15 different security check-points were set up at the main entries and other areas.

All the volunteers were required to report every hour of the day to the main office from their security checkpoints.

The local police also helped during the five days of the celebration.

A total of 8 sadhus and 550 volunteers served in this department.

WATER DEPARTMENT

The Water Department was responsible for the plumbing of the entire festival grounds.

Two fresh water reservoirs were created for the function. The Sahajanand lake had a capacity of 750,000 litres of water while Nilkanth lake held 500,000 litres of water.

Water drawn from three different deep wells was tested in the laboratory before use.

Water was supplied for use in cooking, drinking, bathing and toilet areas, landscaping, stage area, and the temporary office complex.

Tankers were used to spray water throughout the site to suppress the dust. A total of 42 water booths were set up providing drinking water for all.

There were 17 sadhus and 450 volunteers involved in the Water Department.

ELECTRIC DEPARTMENT

The main panel board for the celebrations stage was 26 feet long, much larger than for any previous BAPS festival.

Over 300 poles were erected to provide electricity and light.

Over 500 metal halite lights, 350 halogen lights, 3000 tube-lights and 300 street lights were employed to illuminate the festival site.

For back up and use during the evening programmes 22 generators were set up.

Together with 22 sadhus, over 200 volunteers served in the Electric Department.

ACCOMMODATION DEPARTMENT

Accommodation arrangements were planned

Prasad meal-boxes distributed on entry

Devotees queue to enter the asssembly ground

Inside Swaminarayan Nagar

"Amazingly impressive efforts for preserving and presenting Indian Culture and heritage." -Mahendra, UNI

The 15-ft. high Mantra Vedika: 151,027 mantra books, each having 25,000 Swaminarayan mantras. In all, 80,796 devotees from India and abroad had written 3.77 billion mantras during the centenary year

for devotees arriving from outside Gujarat. For this flats and bungalows nearing completion and located within a convenient distance from the festival site were identified.

Then the sadhus and volunteers of the Accommodation Department approached the builders and requested use of the buildings as lodgings for the guest devotees.

In all, 125 builders generously agreed to allow use of their flats and bungalows. Accommodation was provided to around 6000 devotees from 13 states throughout India.

Since the buildings were new, the volunteers cleaned them thoroughly before use. Every accommodation was checked to ensure running water and electricity. Bedding, drinking water and toiletries were also provided. From 3.30 am every day water for bathing was heated in big containers and supplied to the devotees in their rooms.

The volunteers were present at all locations to cater for any requests by the visiting devotees. A total of 11 sadhus and 650 volunteers served in the Accommodation Department.

After the festival all the flats and bungalows were meticulously cleaned before returning them to the builders.

KITCHEN DEPARTMENT

Initially, when construction began on the festival site, food for volunteers was prepared at Ahmedabad mandir and transported to the site.

Then, from 19 November 2007, cooking began on the site.

The main cooking area was 240 x 105 ft. The food prepared was eventually supplied to seven dining areas at different locations on the festival site. Up to 17 December, over 1.5 million meals were served.

The Kitchen Department was also responsible

Around 550,000 visitors attended the four-day Centenary Celebrations

for preparing the *prasad* meal-boxes for distribution to all who attended the evening programmes.

Hundreds of thousands of *prasad* boxes were prepared, with different food items for each of the four days.

A total of 61 sadhus and 3000 men and women volunteers served in the Kitchen Department.

WOMEN'S WING

The majority of the women volunteers were involved in the Kitchen and Stage Programmes Departments. However, women volunteers also contributed to the operations of the other departments.

Among the major services carried out by the women volunteers were the cleaning of grains required for the festival, cutting vegetables, washing utensils and housekeeping at the Ahmedabad mandir.

Women volunteers packaged 175,000 *artis* and also prepared over 300,000 small paper BAPS flags for use on the final day.

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In this way the volunteers served day and night. Due to their responsibilities, many volunteers were not able to watch the evening programmes. Yet they all fulfilled their duties cheerfully. Summing up their source of inspiration, Han Kop, a devotee from Holland, commented, "I can think of no other person who can inspire so many thousands of people who are willing to sacrifice food, sleep and comfort with such happiness, but Pramukh Swami Maharaj."

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Stories of Voluntary Service and Sacrifice

"What is wrong with you, Vinu? Why do you look so pale and downhearted?" a devotee enquired. The question evoked a stream of tears on Vinu Rathod's face. A few minutes later a composed Vinu revealed, "Both my brothers are not willing to give me leave to serve in the Centenary Celebrations. Since we are all in the business together I simply don't know what to do?"

The devotee friend reassured him and said, "Vinu let us pray. God will find a way." After praying Vinu returned home. He talked to his wife and children about the celebration and its glory. On hearing her husband's impassioned words the wife realized his eagerness to serve. She replied softly, "You can go to serve. Don't worry about not receiving the monthly wages from your brothers. We will manage with a single meal daily for twenty days, but you cannot miss this *seva*."

Vinubhai Rathod of Limbdi travelled to Ahmedabad to offer his services in the construction department. Till he returned, his wife and children ate only once a day to manage from their meagre finances.

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Vijay Modi was a volunteer from Surat. His monthly income was only Rs. 6000. A few weeks back he had borrowed Rs. 80,000 for his wife's operation.

"Why did you volunteer when you have a debt to the tune of Rs. 80,000?"

Vijay replied, "I have already reimbursed Rs. 25,000, which I borrowed without any interest. The remaining amount I will pay in installments. I can earn later, but I didn't want to miss the *seva*!"

"But Vijay, consider the condition you are in."

"For that I shall toil day and night. I have left all my worries to God. He is the all-doer. Allow me to offer my services. Do you know that if I don't do *seva* then my wife will be hurt. It is because of her wish and understanding that I have come to serve here."

Vijay served happily till the end of the celebrations.

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Husband and wife, Dineshbhai and Hansaben Thakkar, were on a railway platform of Andheri in Mumbai. Dineshbhai wanted to travel to the next station to purchase a few affordable shirts. The reason being that he needed them as a volunteer for the Centenary Celebrations in Ahmedabad.

So, both of them climbed the steps to get onto the bridge connecting the platform for the east-bound train. While they were descending the steps Mrs Thakkar slipped and fractured her right hand. At the hospital Dr Telang examined her and said that she had fractured her right wrist. He gave an appointment and told her that he would operate on it on 30 November at 8.00 pm.

Dineshbhai simply sighed. The doctor enquired as to what was bothering him. Dineshbhai replied that he had to catch a train to Ahmedabad on that very day at 10 pm because he had enrolled as a volunteer for the BAPS Centenary Celebrations.

Dr Telang was familiar with Swamishri's noble work and services. He assured Dineshbhai, "Don't worry. At the time you'll be travelling to Ahmedabad, I'll be operating on your wife. Rest assure, and leave the duty of repairing your wife's wrist to me."

And that was what happened. On 30 November, while Dineshbhai caught the 8.00 pm Lokshakti Express towards Ahmedabad, Dr Telang and his nurses had started operating on Mrs Thakkar's fractured wrist.

Mrs Thakkar did not despair at the misfortune that had struck her and neither did her husband become frantic and stall his plans to offer his services as a volunteer.

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During the pre-dawn hours of 9 December Jayantibhai was heating water for the volunteers' daily bath at Swaminarayan Nagar. Despite the fact that he was a prominent resident of his village, Airthan near Kim in South Gujarat, and the president of the Gujarat Farmers Association, he did not hesitate in doing menial *seva*. On seeing Jayantibhai that morning a volunteer remarked, "Jayantibhai, you are still here!"

"Why are you surprised?" Jayantibhai shot back. "I have come here to serve and not to go back mid-way."

The volunteers acquainted with him were astonished by his firmness and enthusiasm to serve. The reason was that on the same morning his son was scheduled to depart from his village on his first trip to China. The entire village was going to see him off. The only person missing

"It was indeed a breathtaking show. I can imagine that such an event of grandeur can only be organized through the dedication, love and affection of people associated with BAPS." -Sanjay Pande, Special Correspondent, News 24

would be his father, Jayantibhai. Later that day Jayantibhai bid his son well and a happy journey by phone.

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Bhavin Patel, a youth of Rajpipla, was married and had a three-year-old son. He had lost two jobs and was struggling to find another. His wife was a teacher with a meagre monthly pay of Rs. 500, which was used up in fees for her computer course. Despite all this Bhavin resolved to offer his voluntary services for 20 days in the Centenary Celebrations. On informing his wife, also a *satsangi,* she encouraged him to go. Bhavin borrowed Rs. 200 and arrived at the festival site. He had faith that he would get a good job after returning.

Bhavin was not a solitary case of such illustrious service and sacrifice. Indubhai Vallabhbhai (Valvada), Alpesh Ishwarbhai, Mangubhai Ravjibhai and Kamlesh Gamit (Hanmantiya, Vyara), Rakesh Babubhai (Malekpur), Rajesh Patel (Vanskui), Chetan Patel (Vaheval) and many others offered voluntary services in spite of their ailing financial conditions. They were all daily wage earners who eked out a living on only Rs. 30, surviving on a daily diet of flour, water, salt and chilly powder. But they all served wholeheartedly during the celebrations.

The dilemma for the sadhus responsible for enrolling the volunteers was that if they did not accept them, then the volunteers would feel sad for the rest of their lives, feeling excepted from *seva* because of their poverty; and on the other hand by enrolling them the problem of sustaining their families would be grave. In this difficult situation the youth volunteers themselves confidently told the sadhus, "Swami, by losing twenty days in earnings will not affect us drastically. But if we lose the *seva* then for years our hearts will burn with pain and regret. So allow us to serve as volunteers."

They all served for twenty days. When the celebrations ended, they returned enriched with a lifetime of satisfaction and joy.

What price can one put on the *seva* of such dedicated and ordinary volunteers!

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Ishwarbhai was an ailing 78-year-old *satsangi* living in the village of Palsana. He was afflicted with multiple chronic health problems like high blood pressure, diabetes and paralysis due to insufficient blood supply to the brain.

Ramesh, his son, had decided to serve his father instead of volunteering his services at the celebration site. On the day he was supposed to leave his father asked him, "Ramesh, have the others left for Ahmedabad?"

"No father. They are going to leave this evening," Ramesh replied.

"Have you packed your bag?"

"No. I have decided to stay and serve you."

Ishwarbhai replied in a voice choked with emotion and pride, "Son, I am 78. For how much longer will I take your services! What guarantee is there for even one more day in my life? Even while serving me you will not be able to stop my death. So, go quickly. Go to Ahmedabad. Please the sadhus and pray to Maharaj to grant me a little portion of the spiritual merits you earn."

For the next twenty days Ishwarbhai relied upon his wife's services, who was also old like him.

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There are many more stories on the monu-

mental sacrifice and dedication of devotees: from youths who eked out a living by selling fast food from mobile carts to owners of small pharmaceutical companies who closed them unhesistatingly. There were also volunteers who washed utensils in spite of their physical disabilities, and children and youth performers who bandaged their legs and feet to do their duty by dancing on stage.

Jay Patel of Ahmedabad refrained from going on a vacation tour to Malaysia and Hong Kong because he wanted to join the dance group.

Vasant Bagadiya forsook the opportunity of playing in a state level hockey tournament and earning Rs. 10,000 to offer his services in the cultural department.

Pradip Anajwala of Surat managed with only three hours of sleep daily for one-and-a-half months to prepare costumes and property for 1500 children.

Bhadresh Patel of Ahmedabad worked during the day and served at the celebration site all night. He transported children to their residences late at night after their practice sessions were over.

Devanand Aiyar had been working diligently in his company for fifteen years. When he did not get leave, he resigned and arrived at the celebration site.

Priyesh Bhavsar shut down his lucrative multimedia company and served for one-and-a-half months in the cultural department.

Shri Jayant Mehta, a senior devotee and proprietor of Elecmac Company, offered his technical services in the electrical department. Despite his fragile health he served conscientiously for over two months.

Dayabhai Patel, the leading engineer in the construction department, gave up his well paid job in a private company to start his *seva* on site from August onwards. Others like Ashokbhai Patel (Jakhoravala), Suresh Patel and members of Shayona Company (Ahmedabad), Kantibhai Ladani (Rajkot), etc. dedicated their JCB, dumper, roller and other construction equipment for the site preparations.

Three days before his final stage performance, 14-year-old Paras Soni of Surat hurt his foot when a pickaxe fell on it. Yet still, Paras braved the discomfort to continue participating in the festival dances.

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The accounts of sacrifice and service are voluminous. Whatever little that has been mentioned reflects the essence of the profound dedication and selfless *seva* of over 13,000 volunteers in 39 departments. Their stories, written or unsung, have forever been etched in the divine annals of Bhagwan Swaminarayan and Pramukh Swami Maharaj. All the volunteers have equally become the recipients of their divine blessings and joy.

Could any worldly profit or gain have matched with the beaming smiles and faces of the volunteers when they departed from Swaminarayan Nagar!

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OPINIONS

The feelings I got were that one pure man (Bapa) can change the bad world. I just felt all the performers were working hard. I also felt that Bapa can make so many united in peace. It was just extraordinary!

Siddharth Solanki, 10 yrs
Singapore

This is my first brush with a BAPS festival ever. I had not imagined in my wildest dreams the magnitude, a volunteer force and their politeness, friendliness, the discipline, the organizational skills that I saw. The crowd of three lakh people on one site and there is absolute harmony and brotherhood, irrespective of class, creed, caste, colour and religion amongst them. I am simply amazed."

Shri Muthupandian,
A well-wisher and hotel owner,
Pondicherry

It's amazing, how they are able to bring so many people at one place and to entertain them for 3 hours.

Everything right from parking to stage is wonderful.

I liked the Bal Din most as it's difficult to bring such small kids together and to have such precise coordination between them.

Tejas Patel, 21 yrs
Colombus, Ohio, USA

Programmes were brilliant. BAPS has grown exponentially in the past few years. The quality, the technology, the experience, everything was great.

Amazing service and good hospitality by volunteers in true spirit of Swaminarayan.

Ajay Markand, 38 yrs
South Africa, Johannesburg.

It was a very inspiring and motivating presentation organized by BAPS. The BAPS is contributing toward character-building and ethics in society. It is essential for progress of the country.

C.P. Singh,
Inspector General of Police (Ret'd)

It is a miracle created by the FAITH of people having devoted themselves.

I wish such discipline is cultivated in the public at large.

Ravi R. Tripathi
Judge, High Court of Gujarat

A rainbow of youth energy, passion for devotion and zeal to feel the soul of excellence is visible. It has been conveyed that spirituality can also be choreographed and designed with such

overwhelming grandeur.

I admire the international standard of management and co-ordination by youth only.

Jay Vasavada, Writer-Orator

The programme was fantastic and excellent. I have never heard such a musical form before. Music was modern and also classical with all Indian instruments.

The dances were very well choreographed, and me and my family were engrossed all the time.

Upendra Parikh
Consulting Engineer/Architect

I have been attending BAPS *mahotsavs* since 1992, Gandhinagar Akshardham. Each festival celebration surpasses the previous one though, at each event, this seems an impossibility. Yet again, BAPS has achieved another remarkable level of organization: the scale, sheer numbers of volunteers, the stage programmes and even the thoughtful dinner boxes are overwhelming. That all of this has been the inspiration of one humble and soft-spoken leader, Guru Pramukh Swami, is truly something extraordinary. I am honoured to have been able to witness and to have participated, in a small way, in this historical event. Thank you. Jay Swaminarayan.

Dr Hanna H. Kim
Professor, Anthropology
New York University, USA

Today's festival was a wonderful display of colour and dance as well as a very clear description of everything BAPS is about. The BAPS organization is 100 years old and I'm sure it will last to 200 years. I can only hope that Guinness World Records lasts just as long. Meeting His Holiness was a wonderful honour to me that I will never forget.

Michael Whitty
Guinness World Records, London

If people like him (Pramukh Swami Maharaj) are living, there is going to be peace, peace, peace; peace everywhere in the world.

Mrs. T.M. Shaikh
Family Court Judge, Ahmedabad

It is absolutely impossible to say which of the evenings was the most beautiful. All were just perfect and each in itself brought across its specific message. All participants, whether in the preparation and building of the stage, behind the scenes or on stage have put in their utmost dedication and passion to make it a perfect night, every night.

There is no way to judge which performance was best, who's live-story is the most touching, which BAPS relief mission was the most crucial.

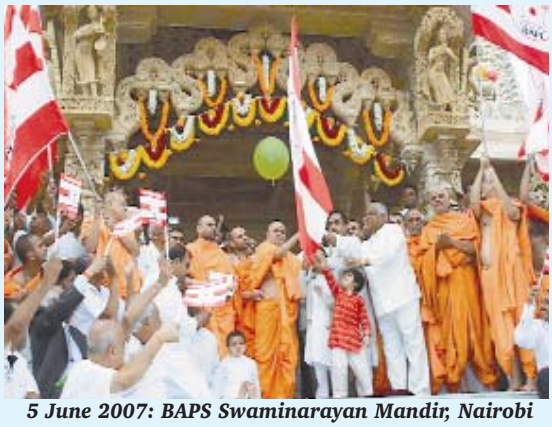
To understand, how all this was possible and how more than 3 lakh people could gather peacefully without any incident at all, one has to ask, where do all these people get their dedication from, their prowess to overcome obstacles in life, their determination in living up to social and spiritual values. Who steers their devotion?

In fact, the inexhaustible source is the most modest man I have seen in my life, Pramukh Swami Maharaj.

Markus Schories
Germany

BAPS Centenary Year Celebrations Worldwide

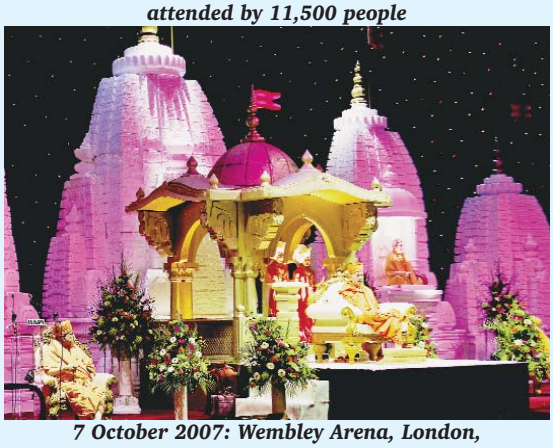
Throughout the year, thousands attended the spectacular BAPS Centenary Ce
throughout North America, UK, East Africa and India.



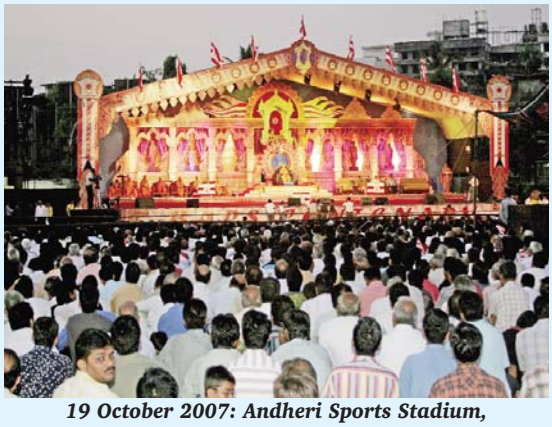
5 June 2007: BAPS Swaminarayan Mandir, Nairobi

17 June 2007: Sears Center, Chicago, attended by 11,500 people

4 August 2007: Continental Arena, Edison, New Jersey, attended by 22,000 people



7 October 2007: Wembley Arena, London, attended by 12,000 people



19 October 2007: Andheri Sports Stadium, Mumbai, attended by 20,000 people

15 November 2007: Racecourse Ground, Rajkot, attended by 22,000 people

Hope, Beyond the Obvious

Tarun Vijay, Editor, Panchajanya

And here is a fabulous story that assures us about the great future we shall certainly have – India is on an unstoppable path of glory and happiness in spite of all the wrongs we witness, more through a media that unfortunately uses the misery, trivia and all that is bad to increase its circulation and TRP ratings. One such event that almost skipped media attention was a centenary celebration of a young, vibrant and creative people's organisation I was privileged to witness.

If the Indian media celebrated the rise of Vikram Pandit to head Citigroup, the renouncement of worldly pleasures and lucrative careers by fifteen young Hindu professionals from the US and the UK, joining a revolutionary Hindu order of ochre-robed sannyasins of the Swaminarayan sect, was taken quite coolly by the sect popularly known as BAPS (Bochasanwasi Shri Akshar Purushottam Swaminarayan Sanstha) and completely ignored by newspapers and channels. This extraordinary sect with modern ideas about Hindu resurgence has crossed an astounding number of 785 highly qualified Hindu monks serving the poor, illiterate and disadvantaged Indians with a firm, unapologetic Hindu colour. The BAPS were awarded two entries in the Guinness Book of World Records by its central committee member Michael Whitty who specially flew in to Ahmedabad to present the certificates to Pramukh Swami, the head of the sect at their centenary celebrations. The first record is for having built the largest functional comprehensive Hindu temple, Akshardham in Delhi, and the second one, in the name of Pramukh Swami, is for having consecrated the largest number of Hindu temples, 713 precisely, in five continents across the oceans.

Comparatively, the Swaminarayan sect is new, formed in December 1801 by an ascetic Ghanshyam who later rose to be revered as Bhagwan Swaminarayan. He was born in UP, in village Chhapaiya near Ayodhya in April, 1781 and as a divinely gifted boy roamed free since his childhood in the Himalayas and Kailas Manasarovar, finding ultimately his guru and *karmabhumi* in Gujarat. Later, a stream of the sect formed BAPS in 1907 and gave it a signifi-

"The movement has been able to attract the brilliant young minds sparkling with new ideas and innovations in socio-cultural as well as religious arenas. Each step and act of theirs looks like a celebration of life – no place for despondency or disillusionment anywhere."

cance, relevant to contemporary times.

But the best part about it is the fact that while holding fort for the age old Vedic ethos and Hindu civilisation in an unapologetic manner, the movement has been able to attract the brilliant young minds sparkling with new ideas and innovations in socio-cultural as well as religious arenas. They do everything: From temple cleaning to washing clothes and learning Sanskrit to understanding Vedas and other Hindu scriptures to painting and applying computer sciences in order to help spiritual advancement. They have some of the best creative artists as sannyasins and devoted youngsters outside the pale of ochre-robed order. Like Ritesh Gadhia, ex-IIM, Bangalore, and Sanjay Parikh, M.Tech. from IIT, Kanpur, who helped design and execute creations like Akshardham and make films for Imax theatres running shows in a number of temples to explain the deep philosophies of Hinduism. And they say no, a strict no to any caste-based discrimination. All are equal and special drives are undertaken to spread literacy, life sciences, medical help in Dalit and tribal areas. The young monks run adult education centres, mobile dispensaries, hospitals, schools, de-addiction centres and religious awakening campaigns all over. The women, youth and children's groups have a special task on their hands like special campaigns for de-addiction and mobilising support whenever there is a natural or man-made calamity. They provided help in a big way during the Gujarat earthquake and tsunami, too, down south.

But does this sect cater to mostly Gujaratis? Yes, it has a lot to do with their inception like the Bengali touch in Ramakrishna Mission and a Malayalam colour to Amma's movement. Yet, their vision and actions remain pan-Indian in such a thrilling way that almost every one of their programme, essentially a religious one, has a Tricolour and a touch of Bharat bhakti. They have superbly juxtaposed the saffron spirit with the Tricolour, linking devotion to the Dharma with glory of the nation.

Each step and act of theirs looks like a celebration of life – no place for despondency or disillusionment anywhere. The most striking thing about a Swaminarayan place is cleanliness, humility, and perfection to the last detail. They have their own publishing and printing unit with the best of facilities. The programmes like the one I attended at Ahmedabad with 2.75 lakh devotees from India and abroad, was all planned and executed by monks and devotees, from layout plans to the creation of a mega-star film-studio like stage for the performances.

And all of them remained just aloof to the

visits of any so-called VIP or the big guns in their functions. None ever asked if a political leader visited the Swami or attended the discourse. Everyone was simply glued to see Pramukh Swami and dedicated their efforts, achievements and creations to him. The surprising fact for those who look at such movements as a can-be-discarded farce or simply Babaji hypocrisies is that an octogenarian Swami, 87 years of age, has been attracting the young, freshly graduated or undergrads, engineers, doctors, CAs, attorneys, who had an exciting new life lying before them, with salaries that would be the envy of any professional, simply vying with each other to devote their life for the cause of society. There have been a number of such cases where the only son, with no other sister or brother in the family finally coming to Pramukh Swami to get permission to live as an ascetic. The first condition to admit such aspirants is that the boy, willing to devote his life as a Hindu monk should have a happy consent of both the parents, mother first and father too. Unless it happens, none is allowed to get ordained as a monk.

And see what marvels have these sannyasins created. Akshardham, declared the world's largest temple on December 17, is 356 ft wide, 141 ft high, with an area of 86,342 sq. ft. The grand, ornately hand-carved stone temple has been built without structural steel in five years, employing 11,000 artisans and volunteers. The temple is not just a religious place with images of Shiva, Durga and Swaminarayan, but it also showcases prominently through a large screen format and a Walt Disney style exhibition seen through a boat ride, a unique and breathtaking view of ancient India's glorious achievements in science, technology, medicine, astronomy, mathematics, geometry and war sciences. Heroes Park in the temple shows life-size statues of Indian heroes like Guru Govind Singh, Shivaji, Maharana Pratap and Subramanyam Bharati. Their London temple, considered as an eighth wonder in Europe is visited by more than 480,000 visitors annually. And the temples are also a centre of family conventions, language classes, parenting seminars, blood donation drives and sports competitions.

Those who feel disillusioned seeing the politicians failing an otherwise great nation, should turn their eyes away from Delhi and state capitals and try to look at such movements which have emerged stronger, contributing positively for everyone's welfare without any state help, rather in spite of a state polity that thrives on distancing from Hinduism and placating non-Hindus. They are creating a new, Abhinav Bharat, a resurgent India that's creative, compassionate and friendly to all. Such firebrand youngsters, with a spark in their eyes and an unfathomable love for their motherland are working in many organisations, amongst students, tribals, through religious orders and through non-religious ones, from Bangalore to Bomdila and Leh to Port Blair. Aren't these elements the real Brahmas of India, Bharat Bhagya Vidhata?

Courtesy: The Times of India *and Shri Tarun Vijay. This is an edited version of what appeared in* The Times of India *(Delhi edition) on 2 January 2008.* ◆

Global honour for Akshardha
Makes it To Guinness Book As World's Largest Hindu Temple Compl
IT'S A GUINNESS RECORD
Delhi's Akshardham is the world's largest temple
અહા! જિંદગી
પ્રમુખસ્વામીના પ્રભાવનું રહસ્ય
ndustan Times
hi's Akshardham is orld's largest temple
THE TIMES OF INDIA
BRITNEY SPEARS IN TALKS TO PLAY VIRGIN MARY IN SATIRICAL FILM
YUVRAJ IN EXCLUSIVE INTERVIEW: I ENJOY BATTING ON PACY AUSSIE PITCHES
समर्पण
UTH POWER
don't flaunt our lture, we live it'
Hindustan Time
NATION, P11 | Curtains for 'Crane Bedi' as govt accepts
Robert De Niro, the big daddy of acting, unplugged
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BAPS are part of a drive to help addicts
EXCLUSIVE
LIVE
AHMEDABAD

Media Coverage

Prior to the four-day Centenary Celebrations a press meet was held on 11 December on the festival site at Chandkheda, Ahmedabad. The media reporters witnessed the stage rehearsals and reported about the festival preparations and programme agenda. Another press meet was arranged with Michael Whitty of the Guinness World Records on 17 December.

We express our gratitude to all newspapers, magazines and TV channels that gave coverage to the festival on the state, national and international level.

A brief account of some of the records is as follows:

Chitralekha: 10 December, Gujarati weekly magazine.

Avo Anokho Hashe a Maha Utsav… – The great festival will be unique like…

The article described the history of BAPS service and sacrifice of volunteers, rehearsals by children and youth for the grand finale, a few testimonials of those who were to be felicitated on stage, interviews of senior sadhus and Pramukh Swami Maharaj. (Pgs 40-48)

DNA: 9 December, English daily, Ahmedabad

Swaminarayan devotees prepare for centenary fete

Over five lakh devotees to attend centenary celebrations on December 17

"The 350-foot wide stage, being erected on a 250-acre plot of Sabarmati-Gandhinagar highway near Chandkheda, gives most onlookers the impression that a mega Bollywood event is in the offing.

"However, it is being put up for Bochasanwasi Akshar Purushottam Swaminarayan Sanstha (BAPS) centenary celebrations starting on December 13." (Pg. 17)

The Times of India: 11 December, Ahmedabad

BAPS prepares for Mega Show

Groundwork ready for 100th birthday fete

"An array of rollers working to level the earth, hordes of youth and children practicing round-the-clock and 39 departments just looking after the day-to-day affair. This is the scene at a 300-acre plot in Chandkheda, which has been converted into Swaminarayan Nagar within 90 days. Thousands of devotees and sadhus have contributed to build this site for the four-day programme to mark 100 years of establishment of Bochasanwasi Akshar Purushottam Swaminarayan Sanstha (BAPS) starting from December 13-17." (Pg. 3)

Divya Bhaskar: 11 December, Gujarati daily, Ahmedabad

Pramukh Swamini Nishrama Shatabdi Mahotsaav Ujvashe – In the presence of Pramukh Swami the Centenary Festival will be celebrated

"The festival will celebrate with the purpose to awaken moral and spiritual values in society: Youth Day on 13th, Women's Day on 14th, Children's Day on 15th and Pramukh Swami Maharaj's 87th birthday on 17th. In all 4,000 performers, who are not professionals but volunteers of the organization, will present the stage programmes." (Pg. 3)

The Times of India: 13 December, Ahmedabad

Centenary of Compassion

Centenary of BAPS, Ankur Jain traces its

journey to being the fastest growing Hindu organization. (Pg. 2)

The Times of India: 14 December

'We Don't Flaunt Our Culture, We Live It'

Giving a thumbs down to fast life, fast food, NBA and BMWS, NRGs are moving towards spirituality.

The reporters profile stories of three BAPS youths, two from USA and one from UK.

The Indian Express: 15 December

Day 2 of BAPS fete focuses on Women's Empowerment

"Hundreds of women, dressed in colourful attire, performed skits and dances on day two of the Bochasanwasi Akshar Purushottam Swaminarayan Sanstha's (BAPS) Centenary Celebration at Chandkheda. The theme was 'Women's Empowerments.' (Express Newsline, Pg. 3)

The Times of India: 18 December

Guinness Me! BAPS of all temples breaks record

"Michael Whitty, a senior Guinness official and member of its main Management Committee from London, came down to Ahmedabad to hand over the award to Pramukh Swami. He stated that Akshardham Temple on the bank of the river Yamuna in Delhi is officially recognized as the largest functioning Hindu temple in the world.

"The second certificate is a renewal of the previous record by Pramukh Swami Maharaj as the initiator of 400 temples worldwide in 2004." (Pg. 1)

Gujarat Samachar: 18 December, Gujarati daily, Ahmedabad

- **Photo story of Swamishri blessing Joseph Muturia of Kenya** (Pg. 5)
- **Pramukh Swamino 713 mandir bandhvano world record**

Delhi nu Akshardham sauthi motu mandir Pramukh Swamini 87 mi varsh ganth ni ujavni (Pg. 5)

The Times of India: 27 December 2007, New Delhi

Global Honour for Akshardham

Makes It To Guinness Book As World's Largest Hindu Temple Complex

"It took us three months of research, pouring over the extensive architectural plans of the Akshardham and also those of other temples of comparable size, visiting and inspecting the site, before we were convinced that Akshardham deserved the title," Michael Whitty said. (Pg. 7)

Hindustan Times, 27 December, New Delhi

Delhi's Akshardham is World's largest temple (Pg. 1)

The Hindu, 27 December, New Delhi

Akshardham marks a record (Pg. 24)

Deccan Herald, 27 December, Bangalore

Akshardham temple enters Guinness (Pg. 8)

Chitralekha, 31 December, Gujarati monthly magazine

AE ALAUKIK MAHOL...

(The Grand Ambience) by Ketan Mistry

The two-page article covered the 87th birthday celebration of Pramukh Swami Maharaj on 17 December, and Michael Whitty, official representative of Guinness World Records, UK, presenting two certificates to Pramukh Swami Maharaj.

Namaskar, January 2008, Gujarati monthly magazine

BAPS Shatabdi Mahotsav. Shraddha ane Samarpan Na Darshan – *Darshan of faith and sacrifice* (pp. 32-39).

* * *

MEDIA OPINIONS

The BAPS centenary celebration is not only grand but it is an event that is miraculous and bestows peace on individuals. How beneficial and inspirational such an organization can be to mankind and society.

Brijeshkumar Singh
Bureau Chief,
Star News, Ahmedabad
17 December 2007

It was indeed a breathtaking show. I can imagine that such an event of grandeur can only be organized through the dedication, love and affection of people associated with BAPS.

BAPS truly doing the job of invoking compassion, love and brotherhood in entire globe. I wish and hope continuous success to Pramukh Swami Maharaj.

Sanjay Pande
Special Correspondent, News 24
17 December 2007

The Centenary Celebration of BAPS was celebrated in a grand way in the presence of hundreds of thousands. BAPS has deaddicted thousands of people which is the greatest service to society. I am impressed by the organisation's service to society and the country in times of calamity. Pramukh Swami is of greatest pride to the Swaminarayan Sampraday and Hindu society in India and the world. The festival stage and the programme planning was truly grand.

Shri Kalpesh Patel
Naya Padkar, Anand
17 December 2007

The whole programme today was spectacular and divine. To write about it I believe God would have to send a divine reporter. The way the entire programme was coordinated and the arrangements made in the assembly were most appreciable and congratulatory. Everything is beyond description.

Shri Kanti Bhatt
Columnist, Divya Bhaskar
7 December 2007

Really wonderful!

It was historic, unforgettable and heavenly.

Shri Ramnik Popat
PTI Photographer

All the preparations are destined to offer a grand and very marvelous programme.

Amitabh Madhiya
Garvi Gujarat, London
10 December 2007

If it's BAPS it ought to be grand. It is indeed mind blowing. The planning, coordination and teamwork is indeed praiseworthy.

Keyur Dhandev
Times of India Group
10 December 2007

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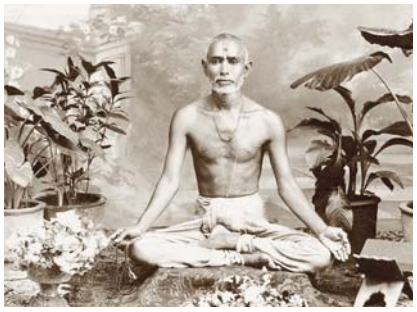
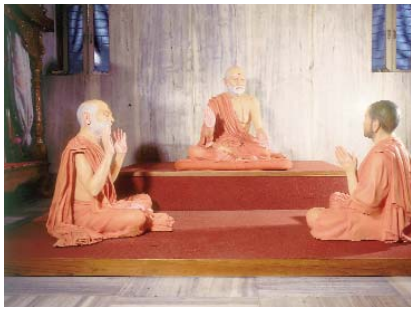
100 YEARS OF BAPS 1907-2007



Shastriji Maharaj

Gondal Mandir, 1934



Pramukh Swami – BAPS head, 1950

Yogiji Maharaj and 51 sadhus, 1961

1907 **5 June:** Murti-pratishtha of Bochasan Mandir by Shastriji Maharaj

1916 **8 May:** Murti-pratishtha of Sarangpur Mandir by Shastriji Maharaj

1934 **24 May:** Murti-pratishtha of Akshar Mandir, Gondal, by Shastriji Maharaj; Yogiji Maharaj appointed as Mahant

1938 **19 October:** Launch of Swaminarayan Prakash, BAPS Gujarati monthly periodical

1939 **22 November:** Shantilal initiated in parshad-fold. Named Shanti Bhagat

1940 **10 January:** Shanti Bhagat initiated into sadhu-fold in the Akshar Deri, Gondal. Named Sadhu Narayanswarupdas

1945 **12 July:**Murti-pratishtha at Atladra Mandir by Shastriji Maharaj

1947 **24 June:** BAPS Trust registered

1949 **3 February:** Shastriji Maharaj Suvarna Tula Mahotsav, Atladra

1950 **21 May:** Shastriji Maharaj appoints 28-year-old Shastri Narayanswarupdasji as President of BAPS, at Amli Vali Pol in Ahmedabad; **30 May:** Nirgundas Swami passes away to Akshardham

1951 **10 May:** Shastriji Maharaj passes away to Akshardham, aged 86; **16 May:** Murti-pratishtha of BAPS mandir in Gadhada by Yogiji Maharaj

1952 Yuvak Mandal established by Yogiji Maharaj

1954 **24 June:** Bal Mandal established by Yogiji Maharaj

1955 **13 April-20 October:** First Satsang Tour of Africa by Yogiji Maharaj; **25 April:** Murti-pratishtha in Mombasa, Kenya; **23 May:** First Satsang Shibir, Atladra

1956 **4 December:** Launch of Swaminarayan Satsang Patrika, Gujarati; **23-25 December:** First Bal-Yuva Adhiveshan, Nairobi, Kenya

1959 **24 October 1959-17 June 1960:** Second Satsang Tour of Africa by Yogiji Maharaj. Murti-pratishthas in Uganda in Kampala, Jinja and Tororo

1961 **11 May:** Gadhada Kalash Mahotsav. Initiation of 51 youths into sadhu-fold by Yogiji Maharaj

1962 **11 May:** Murti-pratishtha at Ahmedabad BAPS Swaminarayan Mandir by Yogiji Maharaj

1965 **6 February:** Shastriji Maharaj's Birth Centenary Celebration, Atladra; **20 June:** Inauguration of Akshar Purushottam Chhatralay, Vidyanagar, by Yogiji Maharaj

1966 **12 June:** Inauguration of BAPS Gurukul, Gondal, by Yogiji Maharaj; **23 April:** Murti-pratishtha in Bhadra by Yogiji Maharaj

1969 **5 February 1969-7 July 1970:** Yogiji Maharaj's Satsang Tour of East Africa and England. Murti-pratishthas in Nairobi and London

1971 **23 January:** Yogiji Maharaj passes away to Akshardham, aged 79; **4 June:** Murti-pratishtha of Sankri Mandir by Pramukh Swami Maharaj

1972 **9 July:** Prarambha Satsang Examination launched

1973 **8 July:** Pravesh Satsang Examination launched; **26 July:** Launch of Premvati, Gujarati periodical for BAPS women; **1973:** National Bal-Yuva Adhiveshan, London, UK

1974 **14 July:** Parichay Satsang Examination launched; **4 August:** Murti-pratishtha of New York Mandir, USA

1974 **29 March 1974-3 January 1975:** Pramukh Swami Maharaj's third overseas Satsang Tour: Kenya, Tanzania, Zambia, UK, USA, Canada, South Africa, Zimbabwe, Mauritius

1975 **19 October:** Inauguration of Yogi Smruti Mandir, Gondal, by Pramukh Swami Maharaj

1976 **4 July:** Pravin Satsang Examination launched

1977 **4 June 1977-3 February 1978:** Pramukh Swami Maharaj's fourth overseas Satsang Tour: UK, USA, Canada, South Africa, Kenya, Tanzania. Mandirs consecrated in Wellingborough, Leicester, Ashton, New York, Dar-es-Salaam, Mwanza; **1977:** BAPS volunteers help during typhoon in Andhra Pradesh

1978 **29 March:** First issue of Swaminarayan Bliss

1979 **August:** BAPS volunteers help after Morbi Dam disaster

1980 **7 May-11 December:** Pramukh Swami Maharaj's sixth overseas Satsang Tour: Kenya, Tanzania, UK, USA, Canada, East Africa, South Africa

1981 **7 March-13 April:** Bhagwan Swaminarayan Birth Bicentenary Celebrations, Ahmedabad. Initiation of 200 youths into sadhu and parshad-order. Over 8 million visitors; **19 April:** Inauguration of Yagnapurush Smruti Mandir, Sarangpur, by Pramukh Swami Maharaj; **29 November:** Bal-1 Satsang Examination launched

1982 **31 March-29 April:** Pramukh Swami Maharaj's eighth overseas Satsang Tour: UK. Opening of new hari mandir in Neasden, London; **5 December:** Bal-2 Satsang Examination launched; Pragna-1 Satsang Examination launched

1983 **2 April:** Launch of Swaminarayan Prakash Hindi edition; **15 May:** Inauguration of BAPS Swaminarayan Chhatralay, Atladra; **12 December:** Murti-pratishtha of Mumbai Mandir by Pramukh Swami Maharaj

1984 **23 March-4 October:** Pramukh Swami Maharaj's ninth overseas Satsang Tour: Kenya, UK, Italy, Belgium, Holland, Portugal, USA, Canada, Fiji, Australia, Japan, Hong Kong, Thailand, Malaysia, Singapore. Hari mandirs consecrated in Preston, Chicago and Los Angeles; **7 April:** Meeting between Pramukh Swami Maharaj and Pope John Paul II, Vatican City; **8 July:** Pragna-2 Satsang Examination launched

1985 **30 June:** Pragna-3 Satsang Examination launched; **10 July-22 August:** Pramukh Swami Maharaj's 11th overseas Satsang Tour: UK; **16 July-18 August:**Cultural Festival of India organized by BAPS on the grounds of Alexandra Palace, London. Over 1 million visitors; **20 July:** Pramukh Swami Maharaj honoured in Suvarna Tula Mahotsav, QPR Stadium, London; **22 October-19 December:** Aksharbrahman Gunatitanand Swami Birth Bicentenary Celebrations, Ahmedabad. Initiation of 200 youths into sadhu and parshad-order. Over 8 million visitors

1986 **20 March:** Pramukh Swami Maharaj received by President Giani Zail Singh at the Raj Bhavan in New Delhi

Yogi Smruti Mandir, 1975

Satsang Examination

Bicentenary Celebration, 1981

Cultural Festival of India, London, 1985

Cattle camp organised by BAPS, 1987

Johannesburg Mandir, 1991

Swaminarayan Independent Day School

Akshardham, Gandhinagar, 1992

1987 **December:** Swaminarayan Aksharpith, publishing house of BAPS, wins 1st prize for printing in Folders, Greetings/Wedding Cards and Book Jackets categories, and 2nd prize for printing in Periodicals and Children's Books categories at the Fifth Gujarat Print Conference in Ahmedabad; **1987:** BAPS serves during the drought and famine in Gujarat: 4 cattle camps; over 13,100,000 litres of buttermilk and 284,800 kg of grains were distributed

1988 **7 April 1988-12 January 1989:** Pramukh Swami Maharaj's 12th overseas Satsang Tour: UK, France, Portugal, Spain, Switzerland, Austria, West Germany, Sweden, Norway, USA, Canada, Trinidad, Kenya, Tanzania, Zambia, South Africa, Mauritius. Mandirs consecrated in Atlanta and Houston; **28 April:** Pramukh Swami Maharaj honoured in British Parliament; **13 June:** Pramukh Swami Maharaj honoured in Canadian Parliament

1989 **22-26 May:** International Bal Adhiveshan, Vidyanagar, India. 15,000 children participated; **1989:** BAPS honoured with 'Best Children Activities Award' by Government of Gujarat

1990 **22-26 May:** International Yuva Adhiveshan, Vidyanagar, India. 21,000 youths participated; **14 June-12 November:** Pramukh Swami Maharaj's 13th overseas Satsang Tour: UK, USA, Canada

1991 **8 June-18 October:** Pramukh Swami Maharaj's 14th overseas Satsang Tour: UK, USA, Canada, Kenya, Tanzania, Uganda, South Africa. Mandirs consecrated in Edison, Eldoret, Kampala, Jinja, Johannesburg; **12 July-11 August:** Cultural Festival of India, Edison, NJ, USA. Over 1 million visitors; **20 July:** Pramukh Swami Maharaj honoured in Platinum Tula Mahotsav, Edison, NJ, USA

1992 **1 April:** Pramukh Swami Health Services, a division of the BAPS, undertakes administration of TMV Hospital, Botad. Over 669,859 patients treated upto December 2006; **1 September:** Inauguration of The Swaminarayan Independent Day School, London; **30 October-2 December:** Yogiji Maharaj Centenary Celebrations, Gandhinagar. Over 6 million visitors; **2 November:** Inauguration of Akshardham, Gandhinagar; **11 November:** BAPS Swaminarayan Sanstha honoured with the Government of India's National Award for Child Welfare; presented by HE Shankar Dayal Sharma, President of India, in January 1993

1993 BAPS provides relief and rehabilitation in the aftermath of the earthquake in Latur, Maharashtra. Emergency aid to 15 villages, 600 homes in 7 villages were reconstructed

1994 **29 April-1 October:** Pramukh Swami Maharaj's 15th overseas Satsang Tour: UK, USA, Canada, Sweden, Czech Republic, Kenya; **28 October:** First BAPS Medico-Spiritual Conference organized. Total of 76 held upto December 2007. Total attendance: over 20,500 doctors and paramedics; **10 December:** Murti-pratishtha of Mahesana Mandir by Pramukh Swami Maharaj, Inauguration of BAPS Swaminarayan Chhatralay, Mahesana

1995 **July:** BAPS volunteers help during floods in West Bengal; **15 July-31 October:** Pramukh Swami Maharaj's 16th overseas Satsang Tour: UK, Kenya, France, Germany, South Africa; **1 August:** BAPS granted affiliation to the United

Nations as 'NGO in Consultative Status to the Economic and Social Council of the UN'; **20 August:** Murti-pratishtha of BAPS Swaminarayan Mandir in Neasden, London, by Pramukh Swami Maharaj; **25 November-31 December:** Pramukh Swami Maharaj's Amrut Mahotsav (75th Birthday Celebrations), Mumbai. Over 8.1 million visitors; **29 December:** Inauguration of Pramukh Swami Eye Hospital, Mumbai. Over 714,400 patients treated upto December 2006

1996 **18 June-6 November:** Pramukh Swami Maharaj's 17th overseas Satsang Tour: USA, UK, Pacific, Far East; **November:** BAPS volunteers serve after cyclone in Andhra Pradesh. Emergency aid to over 10,000 families in 20 villages; **7 December:** Murti-pratishtha of Surendranagar mandir by Pramukh Swami Maharaj; **11 December:** Pramukh Swami Health Care & Research Centre, Ahmedabad, inaugurated. Over 350,300 patients treated upto December 2006; **16 December:** Murti-pratishtha of Surat Mandir by Pramukh Swami Maharaj; **1996:** Shri Swaminarayan Mandir, London, receives 'Most Enterprising Building Award, 1996', from Royal Fine Art Commission & British Sky Broadcasting

1997 **22 June:** Inauguration of The Swaminarayan School, Nagpur, Maharashtra; **June:** BAPS volunteers serve during floods in Gujarat. Over 70,000 food packets prepared and distributed; **21 October-11 November:** Pramukh Swami Maharaj's 19th overseas Satsang Tour: UK; **9 November:** Pramukh Swami Maharaj received at St. James' Palace by HRH Prince Charles, The Prince of Wales; **21 December:** Murti-pratishtha of Navsari Mandir by Pramukh Swami Maharaj

1998 **22 February:** Murti-pratishtha of Nadiad Mandir by Pramukh Swami Maharaj; **June:** Inauguration of BAPS Swaminarayan Chhatralay, Dhuliya; **4 July-8 November:** Pramukh Swami Maharaj's 20th overseas Satsang Tour: USA, UK, Africa; **7 July:** Pramukh Swami Maharaj undergoes bypass surgery, New York, USA; **August:** BAPS volunteers help during floods in Surat: Emergency aid to 100,000 families; **26 November:** Murti-pratishtha of Rajkot mandir by Pramukh Swami Maharaj; **1998:** Shri Swaminarayan Mandir, London, acclaimed as one of the '70 Wonders of the Modern World' by Reader's Digest

1999 **22 January:** Murti-pratishtha of Mahelav mandir by Pramukh Swami Maharaj; **2 March:** Launch of BAPS website: www.swaminarayan.org; **31 July-21 October:** Pramukh Swami Maharaj's 21st overseas Satsang Tour: Kenya, Uganda, Tanzania, South Africa, Israel, Egypt; Murti-pratishtha of BAPS Swaminarayan Mandir in Durban, South Africa, by Pramukh Swami Maharaj; **29 August:** Murti-pratishtha of Nairobi Mandir, by Pramukh Swami Maharaj; **August:** First BAPS Mobile Dispensary inaugurated in Khedbrahma. Currently 9 mobile dispensaries serve in tribal areas of Gujarat. Upto December 2006, over 24,65,700 patients treated free of cost; **November-December:** BAPS relief and rehabilitation after supercyclone in Orissa: Emergency aid to over 15,000 families in 91 villages. Subsequently 3 villages were adopted and reconstructed; **15 December:** Murti-pratishtha of Tithal Mandir by Pramukh Swami Maharaj

2000 **1-20 May:** De-addiction campaign by 10,000 BAPS children. Over 950,000 people contacted and 400,000 de-addicted; **9 June-6 November:** Pra-

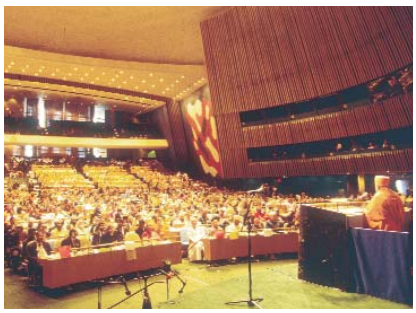
Swaminarayan Mandir, London, 1995

Pramukh Swami Amrut Mahotsav, 1995

Pramukh Swami Eye Hospital, Mumbai

Mobile Dispensary, 1999

De-addiction campaign, 2000



World Religion Conference, UN, 2000

Vidya Mandir, Karamsad, 2000

50th anniversary, Bal Mandal, 2004

mukh Swami Maharaj's 22nd overseas Satsang Tour: USA, Canada, UK, France, Portugal; **8 July:** Guinness World Records recognize Pramukh Swami Maharaj as having constructed the most mandirs. Record updated to 713 mandirs on 17 December 2007; **29 August:** Pramukh Swami Maharaj addresses the World Religions Conference at the United Nations, New York, USA; **4 October:** Meeting between Pramukh Swami Maharaj and President Bill Clinton, Florida, USA; **October:** Shri Swaminarayan Mandir, Nairobi, Kenya, receives Millennium Award for Excellence in Architecture from the Architectural Association of Kenya; **2 December:** Inauguration of BAPS Swaminarayan Vidya Mandir for Girls, Karamsad; **3 December:** Murti-pratishtha of Anand Mandir by Pramukh Swami Maharaj

2001 **January:** BAPS serves after earthquake in Gujarat: Emergency aid to 409 villages, 900,000 food packets distributed, 1.8 million hot meals served, 91,000 patients treated, 4190 homes and other necessary infrastructure constructed in 15 villages and colonies; 49 schools built; **February:** Inauguration of Pramukh Swami Hospital & Research Centre, Atladra. Over 186,600 patients treated upto December 2006; **18 May:** Murti-pratishtha of Sankari Mandir by Pramukh Swami Maharaj; **July-August:** BAPS volunteers help during floods in Orissa. Food medical and other essential emergency aid to 37,000 people in 107 flooded villages in Jagatsinhpur and Kendrapada; **21 July:** Pramukh Swami Maharaj and BAPS received G.D. Birla International Award for Preservation of India's Heritage & Culture. Presented by vice-president of India, H.E. Krishna Kant; **25 November:** Murti-pratishtha of Dholka Mandir by Pramukh Swami Maharaj; **9 December:** Murti-pratishtha of Bharuch Mandir by Pramukh Swami Maharaj

2002 **7 January:** Swaminarayan Mahamantra Bicentenary Celebrations, Gadhada; **17 January-26 February:** Pramukh Swami Maharaj's 24th overseas Satsang Tour: Pacific, Far East. BAPS Swaminarayan Mandirs consecrated in Perth (27 Jan), Sydney (2 Feb) and Auckland (17 Feb); **17 May:** Inauguration of Pramukh Swami Vidya Mandir (Primary and Secondary School) and BAPS Swaminarayan Chhatralay, Sarangpur; **24 July:** First issue of Swaminarayan Bal Prakash monthly magazine for children in Gujarati and English

2003 **October:** Prime Minister Tony Blair visits BAPS annakut held in the Houses of Parliament, London; **6 February:** Murti-pratishtha of Mandir in New Delhi by Pramukh Swami Maharaj; **May:** Ideal Home Campaign by 17,500 BAPS children. Over 475,000 families contacted with message of family harmony; **May-June**: Adhiveshans held in India at following levels: National Senior Yuva Karyakar (465 participants), Inter-Regional Kishore-Kishori (8,300), National Bal-Balika Karyakar (4,800) and Inter-Regional Bal-Balika (35,000)

2004 **8 February:** 50th anniversary of BAPS Bal Mandal. Celebration at Akshardham, Gandhinagar, in the presence of Pramukh Swami Maharaj and H.E. APJ Abdul Kalam, President of India. 20,000 children attended. Broadcast live to over 150 countries; **23 April-29 October:** Pramukh Swami Maharaj's 25th overseas Satsang Tour: UK, USA, Africa. A hari mandir consecrated in Lenasia, South Africa (9 November); **25 July:** BAPS shikharbaddh Swaminarayan Mandir

in Houston consecrated by Pramukh Swami Maharaj; **8 August:** BAPS shikharbaddh Swaminarayan Mandir in Chicago consecrated by Pramukh Swami Maharaj; **December:** BAPS volunteers serve after tsunami on east coast of South India: Emergency aid to 51 villages, 174,000 hot meals served; 2 villages reconstructed: Pattipulamkuppam and Mahabalipuram

2005 **13 January:** BAPS Bal-Balika Mandal, UK, wins joint-first prize in 'Innovation and Change' category of the British Educational Communications and Technology Agency (BECTA) 'IT in Practice Awards' for its Cosmic Vogage CD-ROM; **30 January:** Inauguration of Pramukh Swami Hospital, Surat. Over 67,300 patients treated upto December 2006; **31 January:** Mystic India – first large format film of India, produced by BAPS Care International – wins Audience's Choice Prize at 10th International Large Format Film Festival at Le Geode, France; **May-June:** Regional and Inter-Regional Yuva Karyakar Adhiveshans, India. Over 17,300 participants; **16 June:** Inauguration of BAPS Swaminarayan Vidya Mandir (Primary and Secondary School), Atladra; **August:** BAPS assists after Hurricane Katrina in USA; **5 October:** Murti-pratishtha of Jaipur Mandir by Pramukh Swami Maharaj; **6 November:** Inauguration of Swaminarayan Akshardham, New Delhi, by Pramukh Swami Maharaj, H.E. President Dr APJ Abdul Kalam, Prime Minister Manmohan Singh, Opposition Leader Shri L.K. Advani and Lt. Governor of Delhi Shri B.L. Joshi; **April 2005:** The BAPS Women's Wing initiates BAPS Women's Ideals for Learning and Living (WILLS) programme for the academic, social, vocational and spiritual training of young women

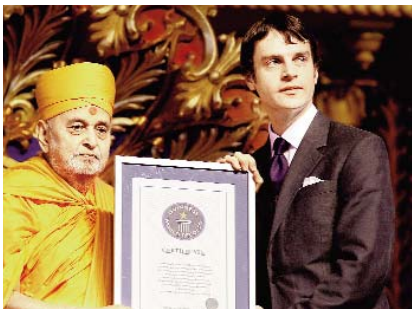
2006 **3 May:** Murti-pratishtha of Junagadh Mandir by Pramukh Swami Maharaj; **19 May:** Murti-pratishtha of BAPS Swaminarayan Bhavnagar Mandir by Pramukh Swami Maharaj; **31 May:** Inauguration of Swaminarayan Vidya Mandir Prathmik Shala (Primary School), Paranera, Valsad (Tithal); **28 June:** Inauguration of BAPS Swaminarayan Vidya Mandir (school), Raisan; **July:** BAPS serves during floods in Gujarat (Surat, Kheda and other districts): 325,000 food packets, 6,000 50 kg family ration kits distributed; **18 October-18 November:** Pramukh Swami Maharaj's 26th overseas Satsang Tour: UK; **28 November:** BAPS Centenary Celebrations launched, Bochasan

2007 **27 April:** Pramukh Swami Maharaj performs Vedic Sahasra-kalash-abhishek ceremony to commemorate 100 years of BAPS Swaminarayan Mandir in Bochasan; **1-15 May:** De-addiction Campaign by 23,000 BAPS children throughout Gujarat, Mumbai, Delhi and Kolkata; **7 May-12 October:** Pramukh Swami Maharaj's 27th overseas Satsang tour: East Africa, UK, USA, Canada; **22 July:** Murti-pratishtha of Mandir in Toronto, Canada Atlanta; **26 August:** Murti-pratishtha of Mandir in Atlanta; **7 December:** Murti-pratishtha of hari mandir in Chansad, birthplace of Pramukh Swami Maharaj; **13-17 December:** BAPS Centenary Celebrations, Ahmedabad ◆

Tsunami relief work, 2004

Akshardham, New Delhi, 2005

BAPS Centenary Celebration, 2007



Guinness World Record, 2007

BAPS News

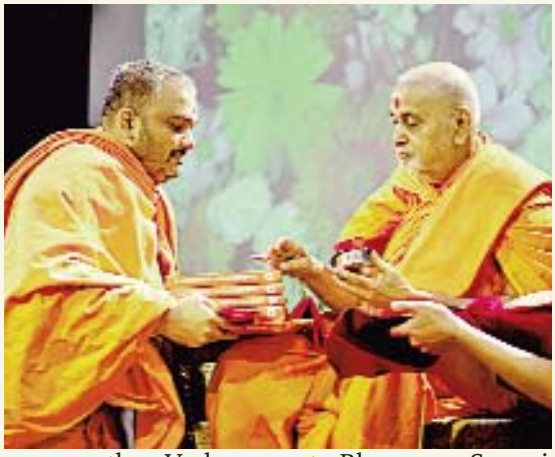
SWAMISHRI INITIATES YOUTHS INTO SADHU-FOLD

16 December 2007, Ahmedabad

On the morning of 16 December 2007, during the BAPS Centenary Celebrations, Swamishri initiated four *sadhaks* into the *parshad*-fold and 13 *parshads* into the sadhu-fold. The initiation *mahapuja* ceremony had already been completed when Swamishri arrived for his daily puja in the mandir auditorium. After puja, Swamishri initiated the 17 youths from USA, UK, Africa and India. ◆

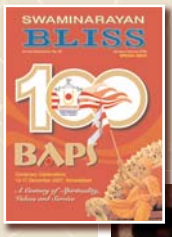
UNIQUE CONTRIBUTION TO INDIAN PHILOSOPHY

17 December 2007, Ahmedabad

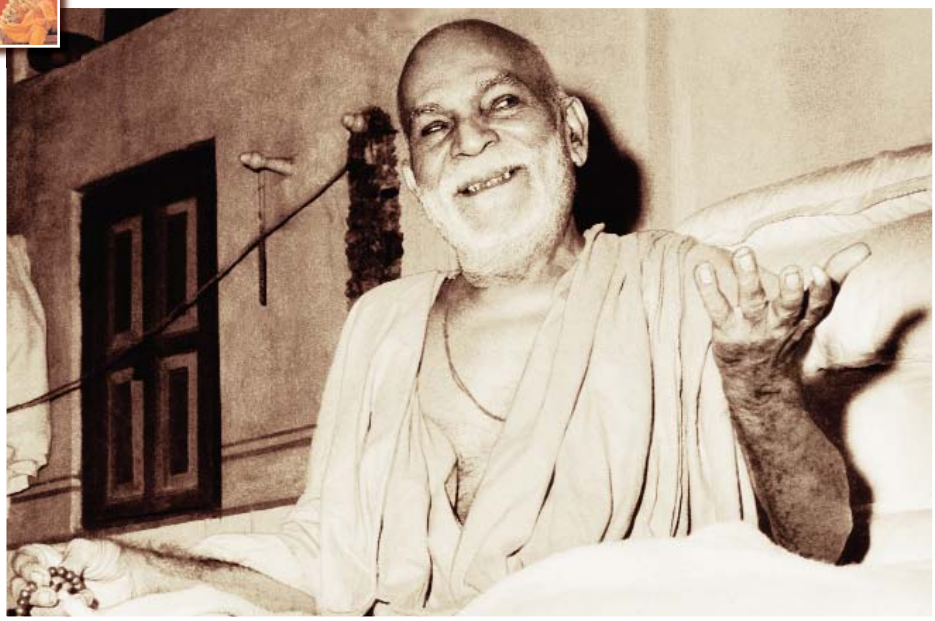


In the Vachanamrut Bhagwan Swaminarayan has revealed his philosophy of the five realities: *jiva, ishwar, maya,* Brahman (Akshar) and Parabrahman (Purushottam).

Based on this and other authoritative sources, and with the blessings of Pramukh Swami Maharaj, Bhadresh Swami, prepared a commentary on the traditional Prasthantrayi of Sanatan Dharma – Upanishads, Brahmasutras and Bhagvad Gita. Bhadresh Swami holds a PhD in philosophy and is one of the scholar sadhus based at the Yagnapurush Sanskrit Vidyalay at Sarangpur. This Sanskrit commentary, written as per accepted scholarly standards, is a unique contribution which explains that the Akshar-Purushottam philosophy of Bhagwan Swaminarayan is founded on these ancient Hindu texts. This important and path breaking scholarly work was presented to Swamishri on his 87th birthday on 17 December 2007. The completion and dedication of this commentary on the occasion of the BAPS Centenary Celebrations was a fitting tribute to Shastriji Maharaj for his efforts in enshrining the Akshar-Purushottam philosophy. ◆



Development

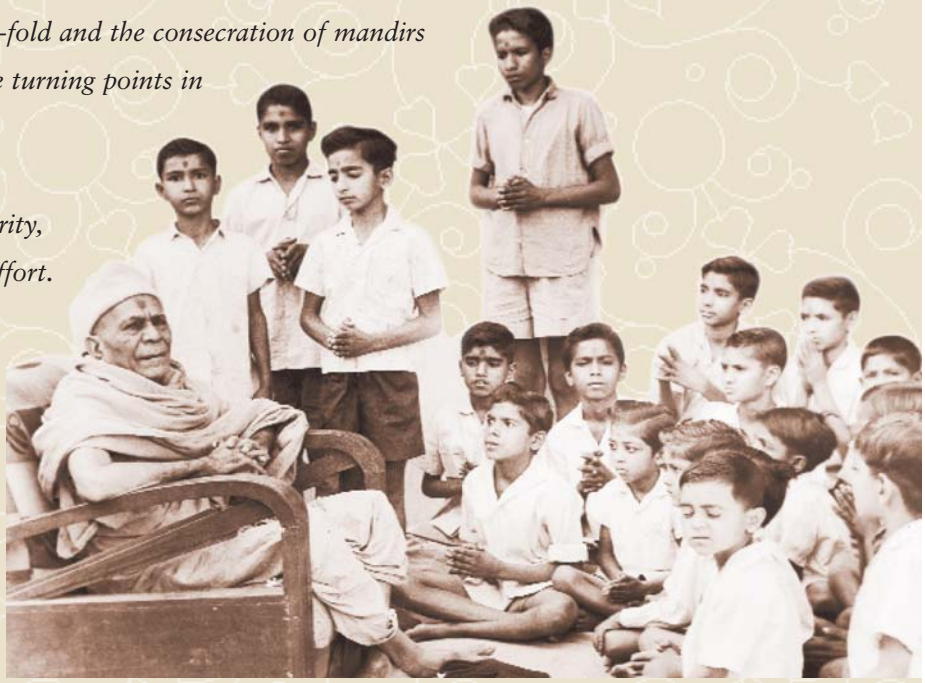


The sustained development of BAPS as per the vision of its founder did not pose a challenge to Brahmaswarup Yogiji Maharaj. Like his guru he was made of the same spiritual essence and mettle. So, the onward march and steady growth was naturally joyous and imbued with divinity.

Yogiji Maharaj introduced the Children's and Youth forums. The Sunday Satsang assembly was also his innovative contribution. Furthermore, the initiation of 51 educated youths into the sadhu-fold and the consecration of mandirs beyond the shores of India were turning points in BAPS history.

Yogiji Maharaj nurtured the organization with his divine purity, abundant love and enormous effort.

A Thousand Appreciations!



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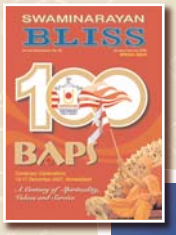
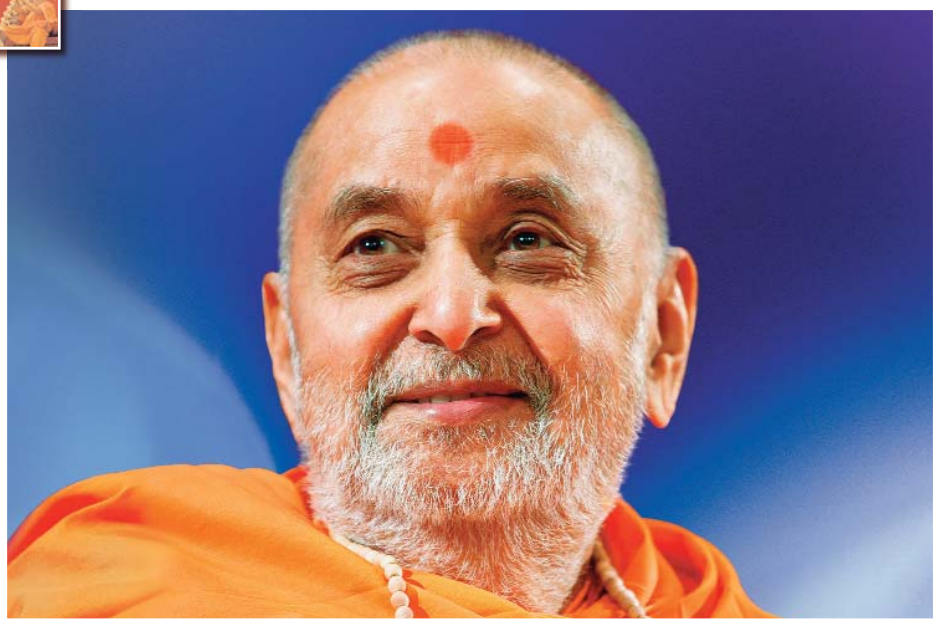


FULFILMENT



Fulfiling the Guru's words and his divine vision has been the lifelong mission of Pramukh Swami Maharaj. He has carried BAPS to new heights with the message of peace, devotion and service.

His untiring vicharan and innate saintliness stand out as the two prime sources of the Sanstha's meteoric rise. Under his leadership the BAPS has organized mega-festivals, relief works, educational activities, health services, etc., and inspired spirituality, character-building and selfless service.

Swaminarayan Akshardham complexes in New Delhi and Gandhinagar are Swamishri's fulfilment of Yogiji Maharaj's wishes.

Through the grand finale of the BAPS Centenary Celebrations in December 2007 Pramukh Swami Maharaj commemorated the divine grace and sacrifice of Bhagwan Swaminarayan, the guru parampara, sadhus and hundreds of thousands of devotees.

May his guidance and blessings be forever with us.

A Thousand Prayers!

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